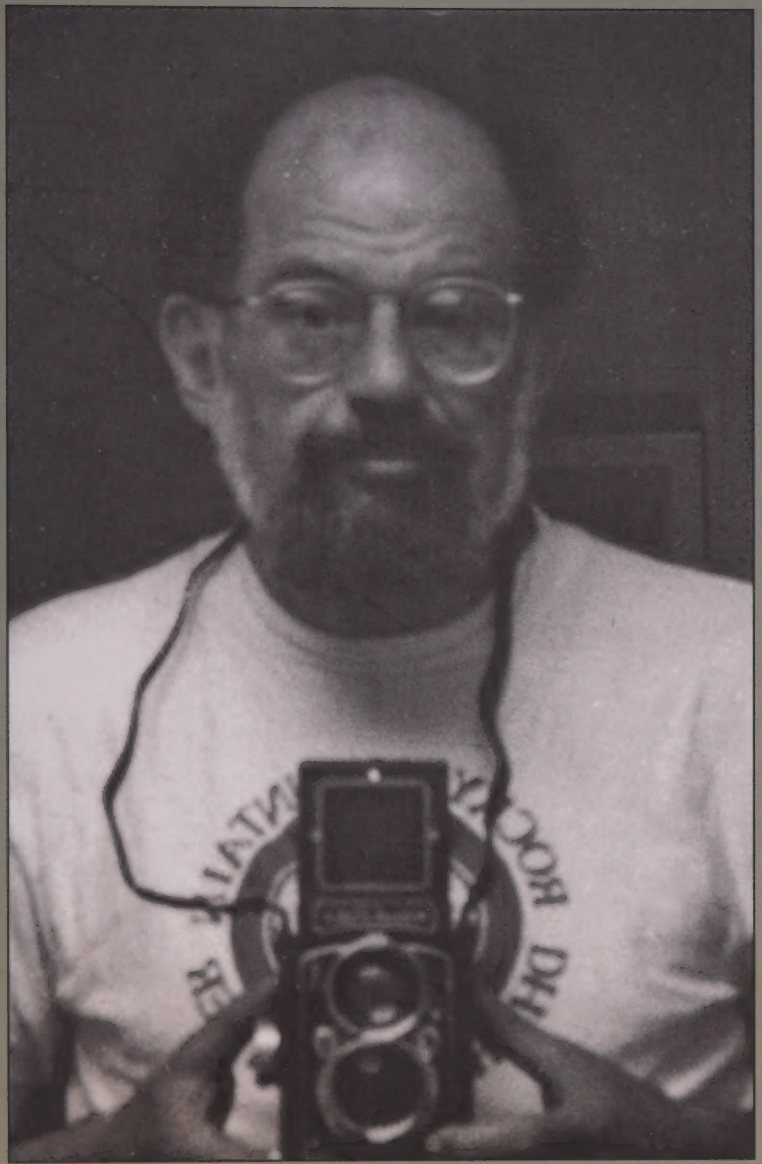

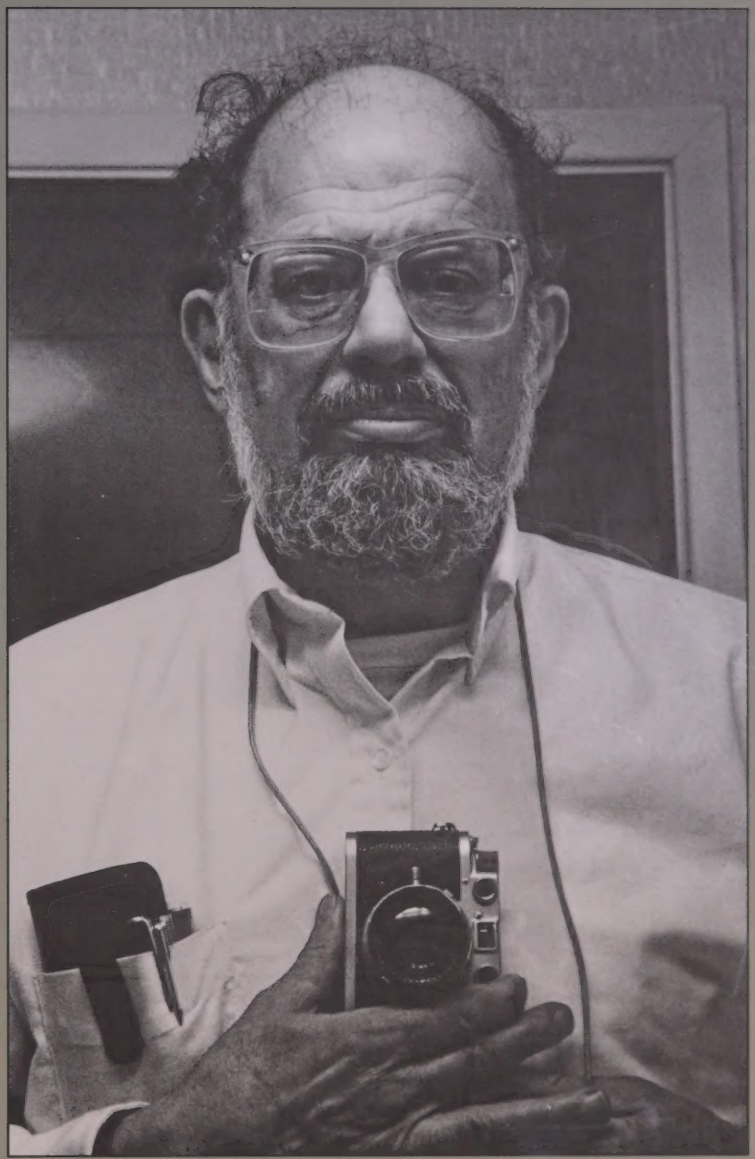

Fleeting Moments, Floating Worlds, and the Beat Generation: The Photography of Allen Ginsberg

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Fleeting Moments, Floating Worlds, and the Beat Generation:

The Photography of Allen Ginsberg

Exhibition and catalogue by John Shoesmith

THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY
29 January – 27 April 2018

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Catalogue and exhibition by John Shoesmith

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"The poignancy of a photograph comes from looking back to a fleeting moment in a floating world." – Allen Ginsberg

The very public life of Allen Ginsberg began in the fall of 1955, shortly after he gave one of the most famous poetry readings of the twentieth century: at the Six Gallery in San Francisco when, as the fifth of six readers, the twenty-nine-year-old read his long-form poem "Howl" to an audience for the first time. It was, inarguably, a seminal moment in American literary history, and helped to create a burgeoning fascination around both Ginsberg and the movement labelled and lionized as "Beat."

But long before Ginsberg and the Beats became both sensations and oft-controversial figures, they were, simply, Allen, Bill, and Jack. They were three disparate and distinct personalities, whose acquaintanceship seemed somewhat improbable yet somehow fateful. It started when Ginsberg, a shy and reserved freshman student at Columbia University, first meets William S. Burroughs, a Harvard graduate a dozen years his elder who was largely living off the largesse of his parents' wealth. Shortly thereafter, Ginsberg met Jack Kerouac, a former Columbia football player who dropped out of school when he was dropped from the football team but who, with one manuscript of a novel already completed, aspired to be a writer. The three would drink and do drugs together, they riffed ideas off of each other, and they creatively inspired one another. They were not consciously aware that they were in the midst of creating a movement; rather they were just living their lives – lives, however, that they themselves would eventually chronicle, sometimes near verbatim, in their literary works.

What has also helped immortalize these men and those early relationships are a series of now well-known photographs, taken between the late 1940s and through to the mid-1950s, before they found literary fame. They are, in a word, iconic: Kerouac on the fire escape stairwell with a railroad brakeman's book in his pocket, smoking a cigarette; Burroughs on the rooftop of Ginsberg's 7th St. apartment building; Kerouac and Burroughs play-acting with knives on a couch, to name but a few. Many of these photographs remain *the* photos of the early relationships of the Beats. At the time, of course, they were not being shot for posterity, but they were simply capturing a moment in time – "a fleeting moment in a floating world," as Ginsberg would later call it. He should know, as it was his camera that was preserving those moments.

Ginsberg will be long immortalized for his poetic works and his crusading social justice. Along with "Howl," his poem "Kaddish" remains an important work in the American literary canon, and his advocacy for issues such as poverty, equality and gay rights made him a global celebrity. In some ways, Ginsberg can be considered one of the last of the household-name poets in North America. He found increasing fame as a photographer, however, in the latter part of his life, beginning in the mid-1980s when his early photographs of the Beats were "rediscovered" and displayed in galleries worldwide, along with being published in a wide variety of books and magazines. With the encouragement of his close friend, famed photographer Robert Frank, Ginsberg began to take the art of photography more seriously, to the extent that he was rarely seen without a camera during the decade leading up to his death in 1997. He was still capturing those fleeting moments – and more importantly, capturing his increasingly rich and diverse life – but this time with a more consciously artistic bent.

This exhibition celebrates Allen Ginsberg's photography and his life, from the nascent days of the Beats up to the 1990s. Featuring just a fraction of the over-7,500 prints held at the Fisher Library – the largest collection of Ginsberg prints in the world (it was acquired from the Howard Greenberg Gallery in New York City, which had purchased it from the Ginsberg Estate) – it showcases Ginsberg's family, friendships, and his world. It is a view of Allen Ginsberg, the literary figure and global celebrity, as seen through the lens of his camera.

This is not the first time Ginsberg's photographs have been on exhibition. The first showing was in January 1984, at the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York City, followed by a steady stream of exhibitions at various galleries and museums, largely in the United States, but also in Europe, Japan, and Israel. They have been displayed in Canada as well: fifteen of Ginsberg's iconic Beat photographs were

part of a group show at the Musée du Quebec in 1987, in an exhibition entitled "Canuck et clochard céleste: l'univers de Jack Kerouac." The majority of these exhibitions emphasized the captioned images: as the photographs were reprinted, usually in an 11x14-inch format, Ginsberg would add a caption, providing additional information about the picture and those in it. While this exhibition contains some of these captioned photographs, it also showcases many photographs that have rarely been displayed, including the original "drugstore" prints from the early 1950s, along with photographs printed in different sizes.

An argument can be made that the photographs, by themselves and without any captions, do not stand up as important photographic documents or as photographic art; that they only gain value and significance when coupled with Ginsberg's words underneath. This exhibition aims to dispel that reasoning. While Ginsberg may not have been a photographic artist on the level of his friend Robert Frank, whose 1958 book *The Americans* was a landmark in photography, Ginsberg's photos contain special and unique qualities – and yes, an "eye" and sensibility – that are well-deserving of both admiration and study.

This accompanying catalogue attempts to further the story behind the Ginsberg photographs. It contains the voices of several key individuals who were crucial to the poet's "second coming" as a photographer, beginning in the mid-1980s: from the person who planted the seed within Ginsberg to not only look at his early Beat photographs in a new light – including the suggestion that he caption them – but also to pick up a camera again and shoot the life around him, to the two primary printers who would bring Ginsberg's photographs to life. These are important stories from those whose roles in Ginsberg's photographic career have rarely been heard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Rossy Family Foundation. Its donation of the Allen Ginsberg photographs to the Fisher in 2012 has greatly enriched the library. The Fisher's former director, Anne Dondertman, was instrumental in securing and guiding this important donation. I thank her as well for her mentorship and friendship. The Art Museum of the University of Toronto has lent several of the captioned prints for the exhibition, for which I thank its Director, Barbara Fischer, along with Heather Pigat and Maureen Smith. Peter Hale of the Ginsberg Estate and Trust has provided invaluable assistance during the planning of this exhibition.

I'm indebted to my Fisher colleagues P.J. Carefoote and Liz Ridolfo, along with Marie Korey, for their careful reading of the manuscript of the catalogue and their editorial suggestions. Any errors are the author's. Lastly, I wish to thank Sarah Bonato for her steadfast love and support.

Part One: The Exhibition

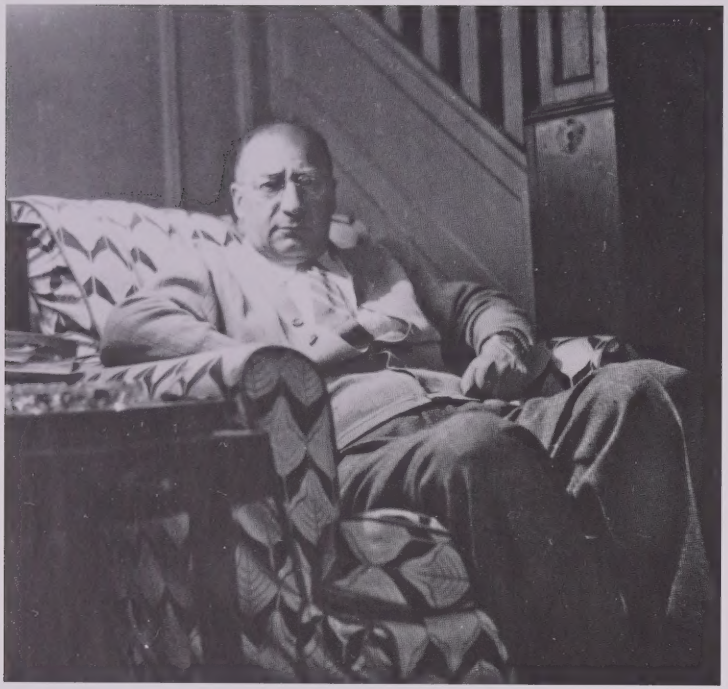
CASE ONE – FAMILY

Allen Ginsberg was born, fortuitously, into an environment where poetry was something of a family business. A schoolteacher by trade in New Jersey, Ginsberg's father Louis wrote simple, lyric poetry, which he would publish in various periodicals, including the *New York Times* and *The Nation*. He was also frequently anthologized in various poetry collections, and published three books of his own, including *Morning in Spring* in 1970, which included an introduction by his son Allen. While Louis initially struggled to come to terms with his son's homosexuality – he also did not approve of what he perceived as the vulgarity in Allen's poetry – he did actively encourage his writing, and would often offer feedback on early drafts. The two remained close right up until his death in 1976. Allen's younger brother Eugene, who changed his surname to Brooks and became a lawyer, was also a published poet.

Through his mother, however, Allen Ginsberg was also born into an environment of madness. Naomi Ginsberg struggled with mental illness for much of her adult life, and was in and out of institutions from the time that Allen was a young boy. This resulted in an unusual, oft-times fraught, but also close and loving, relationship with his mother. Her struggles with illness would often provide grist for Ginsberg's poetry, including "Howl" and "Kaddish." The marriage between Louis and Naomi could not survive her increasing psychotic episodes; they would divorce, and Louis would remarry. He would remain with his second wife, Edith, for the rest of his life.

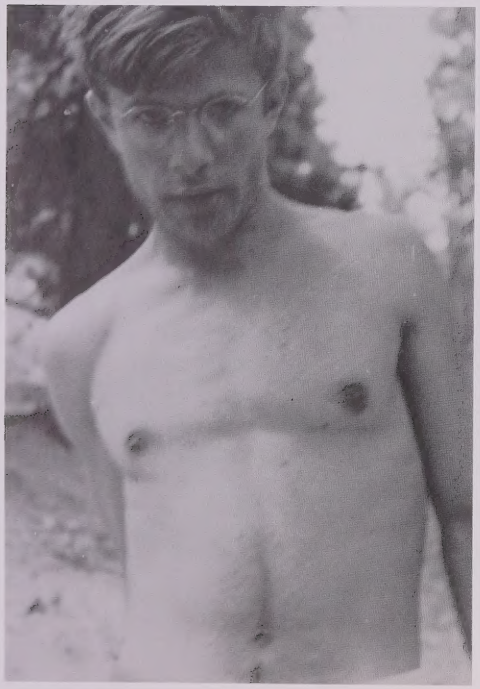
Outside of his blood family, however, the most important relationship for Ginsberg was with Peter Orlovsky. He met Orlovsky in San Francisco in December 1954, through the painter Robert Lavigne, for whom Orlovsky had served as a model. Ginsberg was struck almost immediately by Orlovsky – rather, a young man in a Lavigne painting, who turned out to be Orlovsky. While Ginsberg had at various times tried to deny his homosexual yearnings and play it "straight" with various women in relationships, meeting Orlovsky was the impetus to fully embrace his homosexuality. The two became a highly visible, and unashamed, gay couple; they even exchanged "vows" at a time when society frowned deeply upon same-sex relationships. In this respect, they were true pioneers, resulting in Ginsberg becoming a leader and icon in the gay community. While Ginsberg and Orlovsky were largely in an open relationship – Orlovsky described himself as primarily heterosexual – they would remain together as a couple until the very end, with Orlovsky at Ginsberg's side when he died of cancer in 1997.

This case explores Ginsberg's family, and includes some of the original "drugstore prints" of Louis, Edith, and Peter, along with early self-portraits of Ginsberg himself.



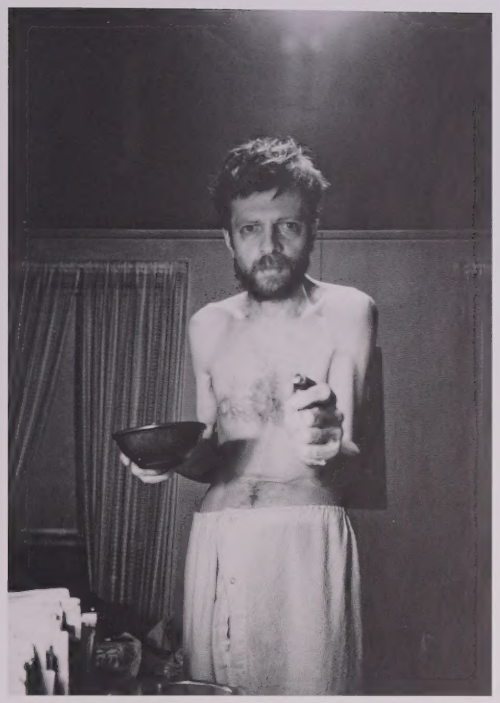
Louis Ginsberg, Paterson, NJ, 1946

Edith Ginsberg at home in chair, Patterson, NJ, 1989



Peter Orlovsky, 1955

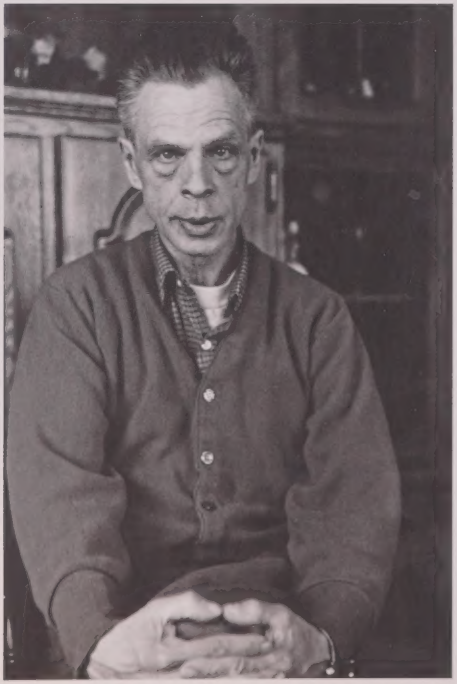
Eugene Brooks sitting in arm chair, 1989



Lafcadio Orlovsky, 1987

Lafcadio and Peter Orlovsky, San Francisco, 1955

Rebecca Ginsberg (Allen's paternal grandmother), Paterson, NJ, 1953



Julius Orvolsky, 1987

CASE TWO – BEAT BEGINNINGS

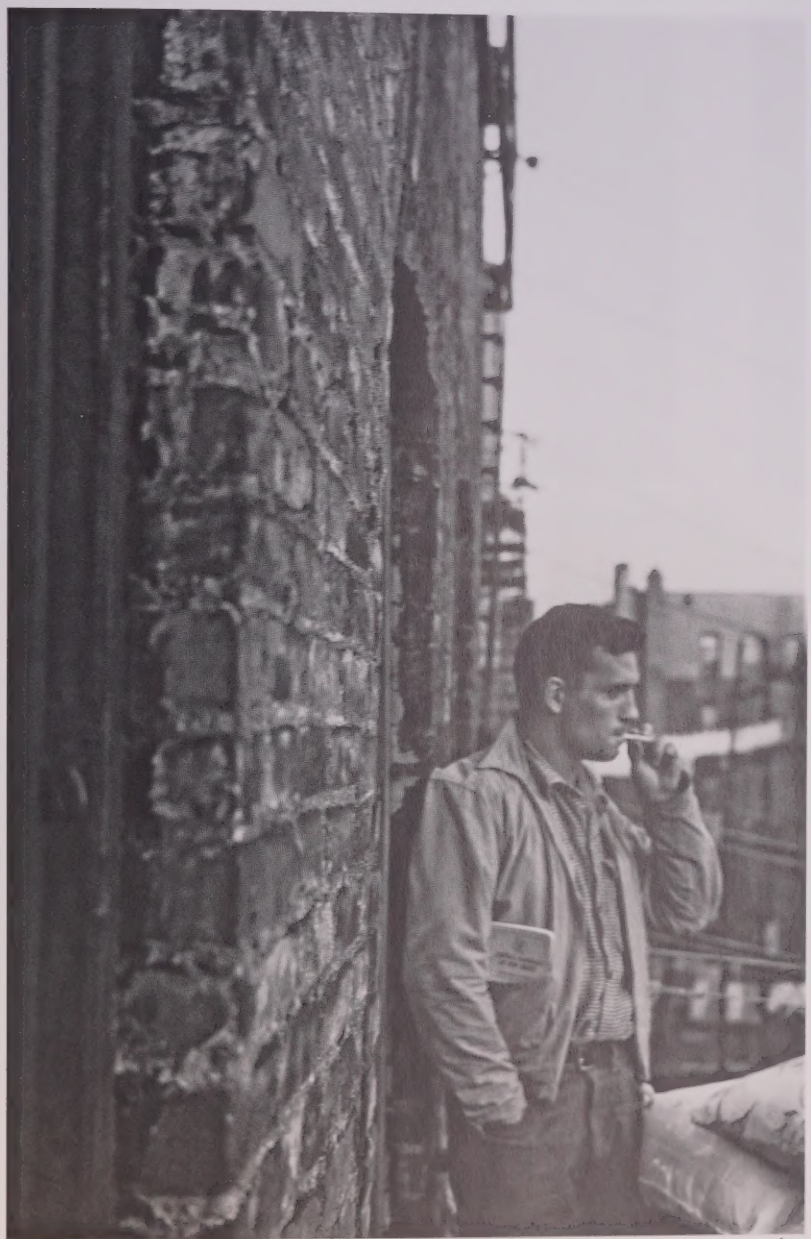
Serendipity often played a role in Allen Ginsberg's life. For one, he was born into a family that both valued and encouraged poetry. But perhaps no event was more fateful in Ginsberg's life than meeting fellow Columbia University student Lucien Carr. As the story is told, it was 1944, and Ginsberg was in his room in the United Theological Seminary on 122nd St. – it was doubling as a Columbia dormitory, owing to the housing shortage caused by the Second World War – when he heard the music of Brahms from another room. He went to investigate where he meet Carr, a fellow Columbia student who would soon introduce Ginsberg to a world outside of the walls of academia. Carr was a key facilitator in the relationships that would eventually result in the Beat Generation literary movement, even though he himself would never publish: he introduced Ginsberg to both William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, who together formed the original troika of the Beat Generation.

Carr's life, however, took an unexpected and tragic turn when he was jailed for the first-degree manslaughter of David Kammerer, a childhood friend of Burroughs, who had followed Carr from St. Louis and purportedly stalked him. He served eighteen months in prison. After his release, he became an editor at United Press International, a job in which he remained for over forty-five years. He stayed in touch with both Kerouac and Ginsberg, and remained close to Ginsberg right up until the poet's death.

More than Carr, however, perhaps no individual was more important in those early pre-Beat days than Herbert Huncke. A gay street hustler and hipster, he was commonly called the "Mayor of 42nd St." in the 1940s. What truly cements his Beat legacy however is that he is said to have coined the term "Beat," which Kerouac then relayed to his friend, the writer John Clellon Holmes, who in the fall of 1952 wrote an article for the *New York Times Magazine* called "This is the Beat Generation." (Holmes himself would write and publish what is often considered the first Beat novel, *Go*, in 1952.) Huncke used it to describe a generation that was weary and had few prospects. He also introduced Burroughs to "junk," or heroin, which Burroughs would write about in his first published work, *Junkie*. Huncke was a true survivor who, despite his often-frequent homelessness and drug use, lived until he was 81 years old, dying only a year before Ginsberg. While not a writer by trade, he was described as a gifted and natural storyteller, eventually publishing a memoir, *Guilty of Everything*, in 1987. Blessed with an expressive, hard-bitten face, he was a frequent subject for Ginsberg's camera over many years.

Like Huncke, Neal Cassady had his own unique role to play among the early Beats. He arrived in New York City from Denver in 1944 with his young bride, LuAnne Henderson, in tow. He met Kerouac and Ginsberg through a mutual acquaintance, Hal Chase, and had an almost immediate and profound effect on the two. For Kerouac, his energy and spirit were infectious, and he would eventually serve as the model for Dean Moriarty in his novel *On the Road*. Ginsberg, however, fell in love with Cassady, a yearning that went largely unrequited (although they were occasional lovers). While a high school dropout, Cassady had a natural intelligence: he was a voracious reader who would actively engage in long conversations with his two better-educated friends Kerouac and Ginsberg. Cassady is also widely credited with providing the Beats their "voice": a long (twenty-thousand-word) largely stream-of-consciousness letter he wrote to Kerouac in December 1950, generally referred to as the "Joan Anderson letter," was remarkable for its raw and rambling style. It gave rise to the Beat's general philosophy of spontaneous writing, or as Ginsberg himself said, "First thought, best thought." Cassady never published in his lifetime, but his autobiographical novel *The First Third* was published in 1971, three years after his death.

This case features many of the early iconic photographs of the Beats from the 1950s, including some of the original silver gelatin prints, along with later images that Ginsberg took of these key individuals during their later years.

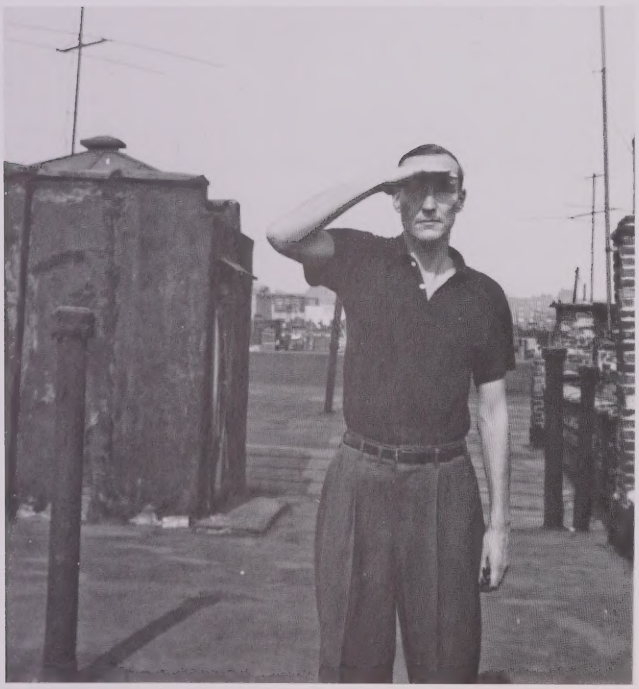


Jack Kerouac, railroad brakeman's rule-book in pocket, couch-pillow airing on fire-escape three flights up overlooking backyard Clothesline South. He'd already published The Town and the City, completed half dozen unprinted classic volumes including On The Road, Visions of Cody, Doctor Sax, early Blues books, & had begun the Subterraneans adventure love affair with "Mardou Fox", L.A. Calem Lee - taken typed for W.S. Burroughs' then in residence editing Yage letters and Queer Manuscripts, unpublishable that decade. I scribed "The Green Automobile", Gregory Corso visited that season, 206 East 7th street near Tompkins Park Manhattan Lower East Side Probably September 1953.

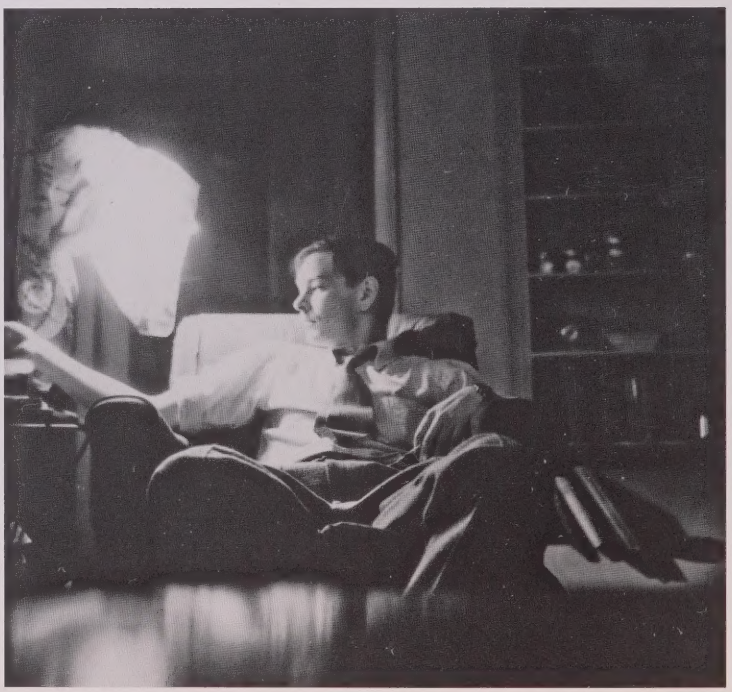
Allen Ginsberg

William Burroughs at typewriter fixing Yage Letters typescript, E 7th street, NY, 1953

Neal Cassady, North Beach used car lot, San Francisco, 1955



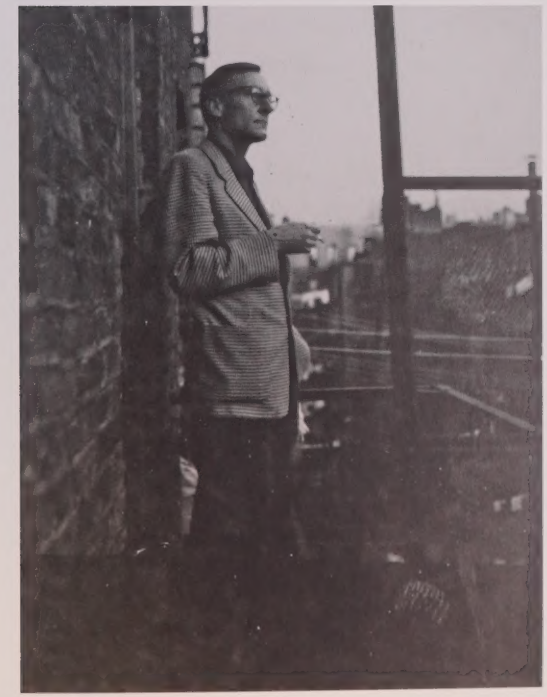
William Burroughs on rooftop 206 E 7th street, 1953



Lucien Carr, New York City, [ca. 1940s].

Jack Kerouac and Lucien Carr, 1944

William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac mock fighting, 206 E 7th street, 1953



William Burroughs on fire escape, 206 E 7th street, 1953

Jack Kerouac looking out the window apartment, 206 E 7th street, 1953

Herbert Huncke in hotel room, New York City, [ca. 1950].

Jack Kerouac, Staten Island ferry dock, 1953

William Burroughs, New York City subway station, 1953

CASE THREE – "HOWL": INFLUENCES AND COMPOSITION

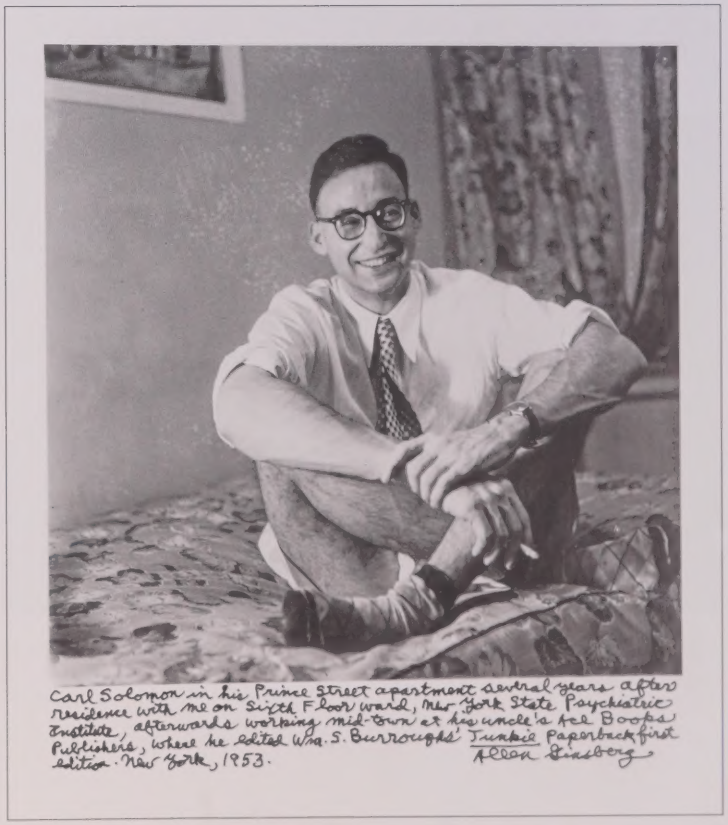
"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by/ madness, starving hysterical naked…"

It is one of the most famous and oft-quoted opening lines in all of American poetry, ensuring the poem, "Howl," and its author, Allen Ginsberg, a permanent place in literary history. Moreover, the 112-line, three-section poem served as a clarion call for a generation and a movement: beginning with its first reading at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in 1955, through to its publication by City Lights Books the following year, and eventually to a highly publicized obscenity trial the year after that. In many ways, American poetry would never be the same after "Howl."

Astoundingly, before "Howl," Ginsberg was, outside of a few poems placed in small newspapers and journals, an unpublished author. While "Howl" was, according to legend, written in one long weekend stretch in Ginsberg's North Beach-area San Francisco apartment, the poem had a long gestation. In fact, it was only because Ginsberg had experienced a number of life-altering events - a mother struggling with mental illness, who was in and out of hospitals; his associations with Burroughs, Kerouac, Huncke and Cassady; Ginsberg himself spending time in a mental hospital and meeting Carl Solomon, to whom "Howl" is famously dedicated – he was able to mentally mine the necessary material for the poem.

But there were other important factors, other inspirations. Meeting Peter Orlovsky and fully embracing his homosexuality, for one, along with channeling the many writers he was reading and looking to for inspiration, particularly Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams (who would eventually write the introduction to *Howl and other Poems* when it was published). So while "Howl," may have been a once-in-a-lifetime creative spark, it could be reasonably assumed Ginsberg had spent much of his life preparing for such a moment.

This case examines the influences behind "Howl" and its composition. Over the years, both before and after "Howl," Ginsberg's camera candidly captured many of those who are openly referenced in the poem: Huncke, Kerouac, Solomon, and Lucien Carr, who asked that his name be removed from the poem's dedication (with which Ginsberg complied). It also features photographs taken by Ginsberg after his move to San Francisco in 1954, including those of his new lover Orlovsky, along with one of the most famous images snapped by Ginsberg: that of Neal Cassady and his then-lover Natalie Jackson underneath a marquee promoting the film *The Wild One*.



Carl Solomon in his Prince Street apartment several years after residence with me on Sixth Floor ward, New York State Psychiatric Institute, afterwards working mid-town at his uncle's tea Boops Publishers, where he edited Wm. S. Burroughs' Junkie paperback first edition. New York, 1953. Allen Ginsberg

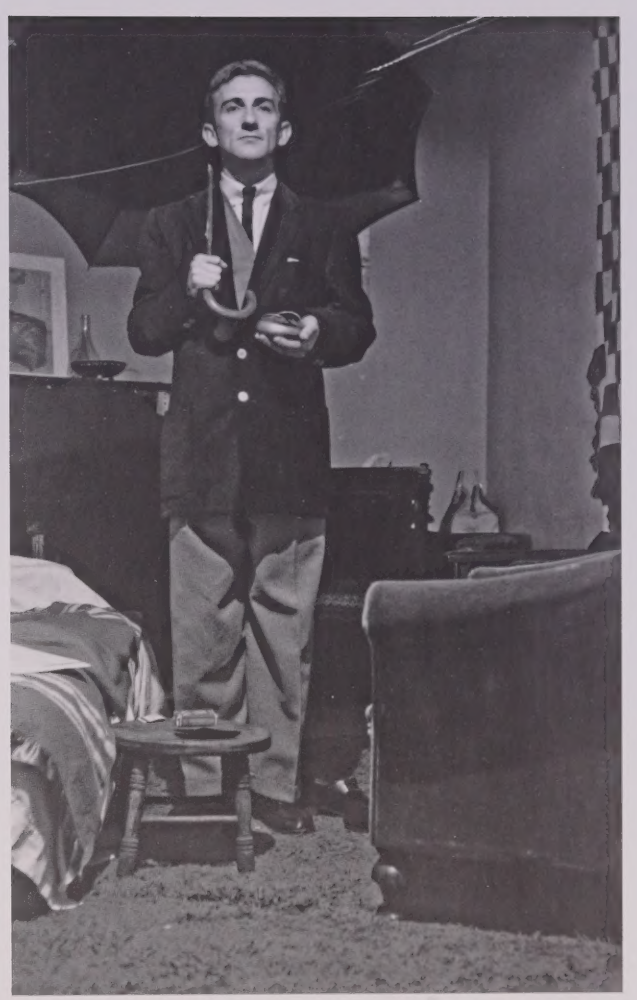
Peter Orlovsky, San Francisco, 1955

William Burroughs, Lucien Carr, and Allen Ginsberg, [ca. 1950]

Allen Ginsberg's room at 1010 Montgomery Street, North Beach apartment, San Francisco, 1955

Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, San Francisco, 1955

Natalie Jackson, San Francisco, 1955



Robert LaVigne, San Francisco, 1955

CASE FOUR – "HOWL": PRESENTATION AND PUBLICATION

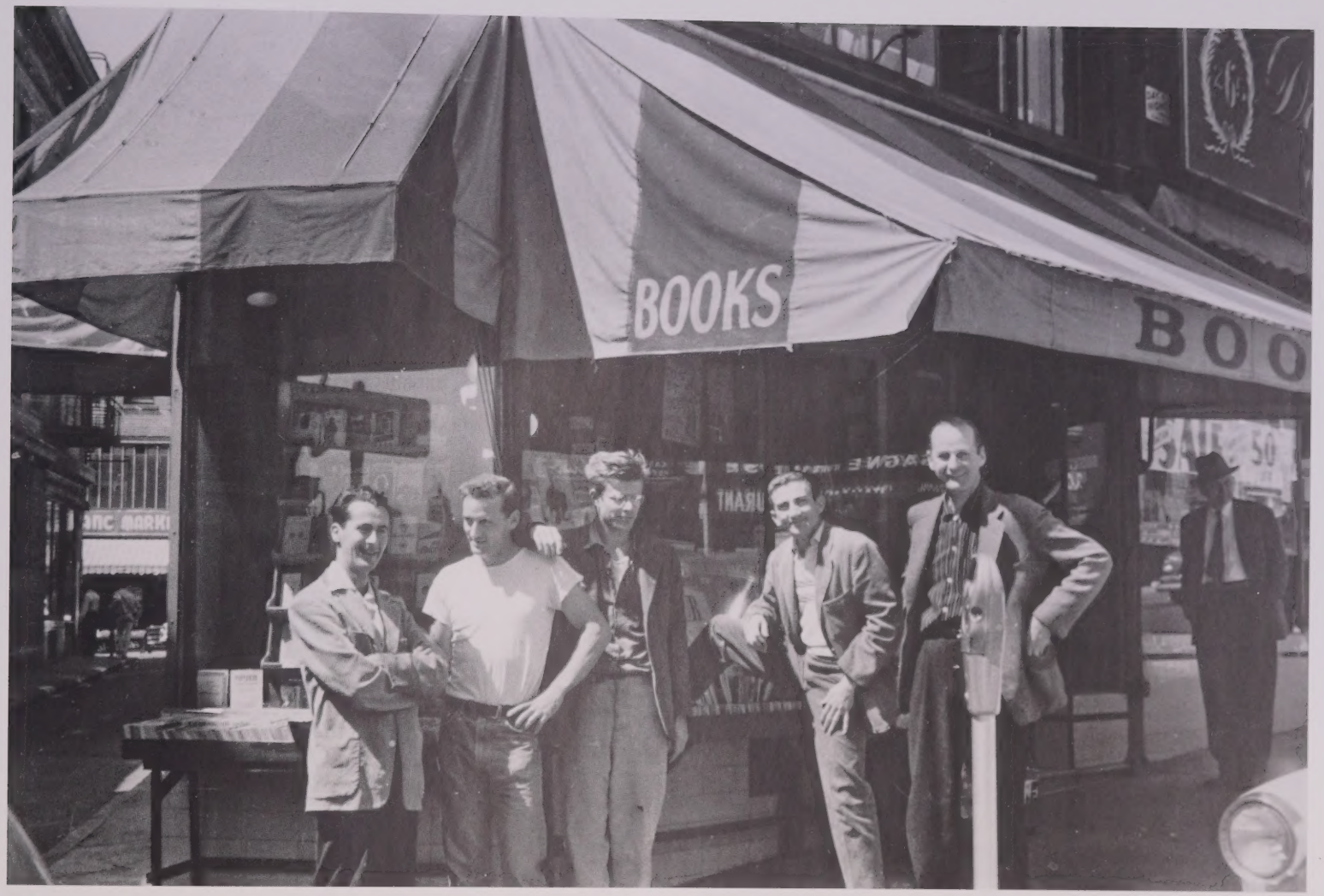
I GREET YOU AT THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT CAREER [stop]
WHEN DO I GET MANUSCRIPT OF "HOWL" [stop]
LAWRENCE (FERLINGHETTI) CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE.

This famous telegram – which itself imitates the famed line ("I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start") Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in a letter to Walt Whitman upon reading *Leaves of Grass* – was sent by Lawrence Ferlinghetti to Allen Ginsberg shortly after Ginsberg read "Howl" at the Six Gallery in October 1955. It was an event which would be written about and mythologized almost immediately after it had ended. While Ferlinghetti himself did not attend the reading, he did get wind of the buzz around Ginsberg's forceful and dynamic presentation of "Howl."

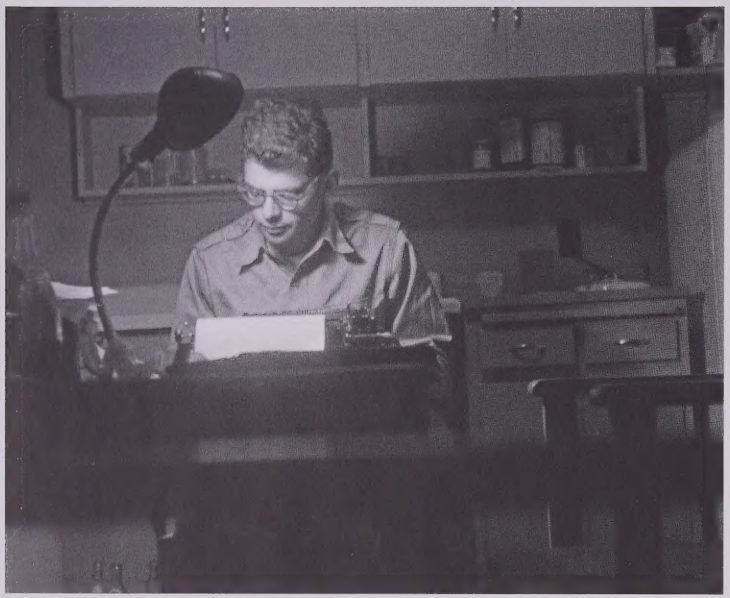
Except for the evening's emcee, Kenneth Rexroth, who hatched the idea for the reading as a means to highlight some promising West Coast poets, all the writers on the bill were largely unknown: Philip Lamentia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Ginsberg. The story goes that Jack Kerouac, who had been invited to read but declined, collected money from attendees – no firm figure has been established on the audience, but some accounts number it around 100 – to buy large jugs of red wine to pass around. The event itself not only solidified the West Coast poetry scene, but it would soon make Ginsberg a bona fide celebrity.

It would also mark the beginning of a long relationship between Ginsberg and City Lights Books, owned and operated by Ferlinghetti out of his San Francisco shop, City Lights Bookstore. A poet in his own right, Ferlinghetti launched the Pocket Poets Series with his own book of poetry, *Pictures of the Gone World*, in 1955. *Howl and Other Poems* would be the fourth book in the series, published in the fall of 1956. It sold well upon publication, but it soon received some unwelcome attention. Owing to its alleged vulgarity, the United States Customs seized copies of the books in the spring of 1957 after they had been shipped from the printer in London, England. A couple of months later, the manager of City Lights Books, Shig Murao, was arrested by an undercover cop for selling *Howl*, and both he and Ferlinghetti were tried for obscenity. The trial received widespread attention, with the defence eventually winning the case when the judge decided the poem was of "redeeming social importance."

The photographs in this case feature the writers involved at the Six Gallery reading, along with those involved in the poem's publication. Sadly, there are no photographs from the reading itself, taken either by Ginsberg or others



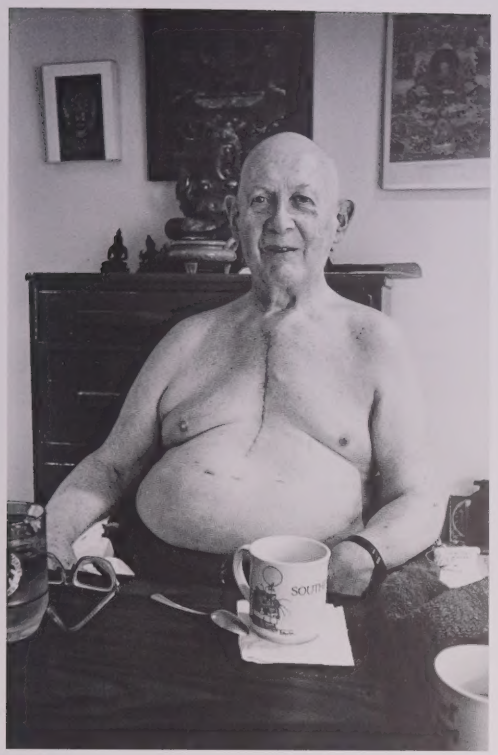
Bob Donlin, Neal Cassady, Peter Orlovsky, Robert LaVigne, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, outside City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1955



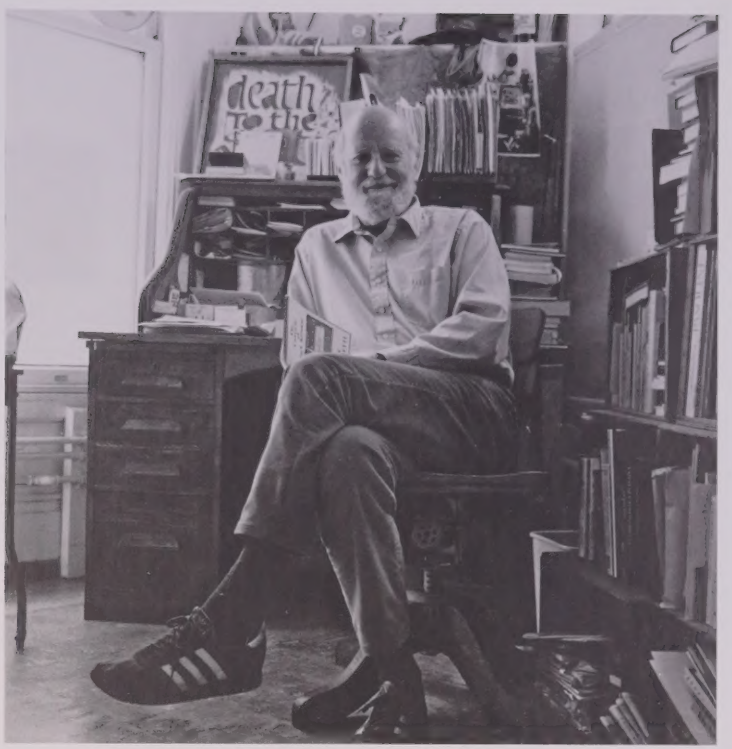
Allen Ginsberg, San Francisco, 1955

Shig Murao, Café Nocturne, San Francisco, 1988

Neal Cassady and Natalie Jackson, San Francisco, 1955



Philip Whalen, San Francisco, 1993



Lawrence Ferlinghetti, San Francisco, 1988

Michael McClure reclining on sofa, 1991

CASE FIVE – THE BEAT GENERATION

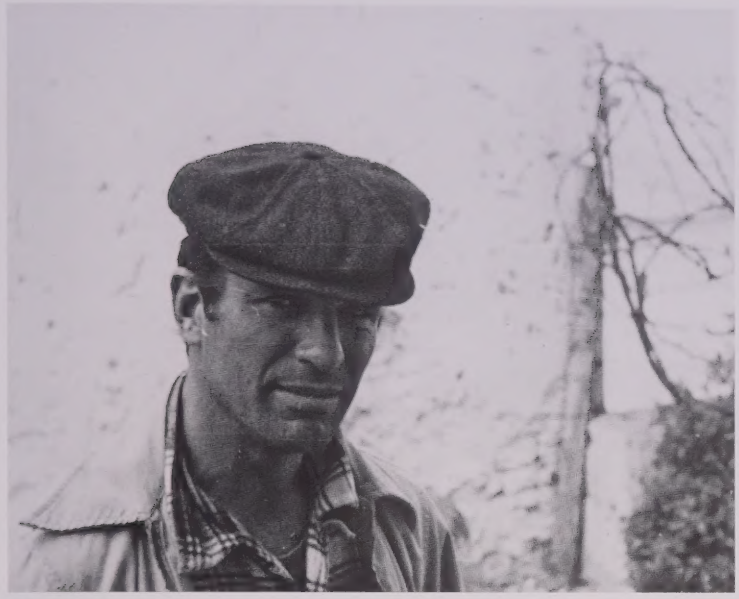
When *Howl and Other Poems* was being tried for obscenity in 1957, Allen Ginsberg had already left San Francisco to travel with Peter Orlovsky. They first went to Morocco, where they met up with his old friend William Burroughs, whom Ginsberg had not seen for a number of years – Burroughs had left the United States for Morocco shortly after the shooting death of his wife, Joan Vollmer. They eventually landed in Paris, where fellow poet Gregory Corso was living in a shabby flophouse atop a bar in the city's Left Bank, which would soon become famous as the Beat Hotel. (Today it is an upscale four-star hotel.)

While the phrase was originally coined in the early 1950s, the Beat Generation did not establish itself as a true literary movement until the publication of *Howl and other Poems*. That would soon change, and quickly, beginning with the novel *On the Road*. Although Ginsberg's old friend Jack Kerouac had been writing and completing a number of manuscripts since the early 1950s – and he had already one published effort under his belt, *The Town and the City*, although this did not contain the rawness and spontaneity Kerouac would subsequently display – it was not until after *Howl* that this work would be published. Most notably, *On the Road*, which many point to as the definitive book of the Beat Generation, was published in 1957 by Viking Press. Although it had been written several years earlier, with the first draft famously typed on a 120-foot "scroll" of tracing paper (reflecting Kerouac's spontaneous writing style), Kerouac struggled to find a publisher. It is largely a *roman à clef*, telling the story of a road trip Kerouac (embodied in the novel's narrator, Sal Paradise) took in the late 1940s with Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty). Ginsberg's character was named Carlo Marx, while William Burroughs was Ray Lee. The book attracted much attention – not all positive – and it gave Kerouac considerable notoriety, much of it undesired. Following the success of *On the Road*, Kerouac would publish a string of largely well-regarded novels, including *The Subterreaneans*, *The Dharma Bums*, and *Vanity of Duluoz*, which Ginsberg often pointed to as Kerouac's finest book.

Others writers were soon adopted into the Beat fold. Gregory Corso met Allen Ginsberg at a lesbian bar in Greenwich Village in 1951, shortly after being released from prison where he was serving time for theft. While he was in jail, he began to write poetry. His work was marked by a rawness and unconventionality, and its street-wise language, which Corso came by honestly owing to a childhood spent in foster homes and on the streets in New York City's Little Italy when he was only a teenager. It fit in well with the general ethos of the Beats. He published his first book of poetry, *The Vestal Lady and Other Poems*, in 1955, followed by two additional collections, *Gasoline* and *Bomb*. Corso and Ginsberg would remain friends until Ginsberg's death, and would be a frequent study for Ginsberg's camera. He died in 2001.

Gary Snyder had an unenviable position at the famous Six Gallery reading in 1955: he was the last performer of the evening (he read his poem "A Berry Feast"), following the celebrated reading by Ginsberg of "Howl." Still, the event itself resulted in what was called the San Francisco Renaissance, of which Snyder was considered a leader. Both Ginsberg and Kerouac warmly befriended Snyder, who would be the model for Japhy Ryder, the main character in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Snyder was considered one of the key contributors to the Beat Generation canon, particularly his second collection of poetry, *Myths & Text*, which Ginsberg singled out as an important Beat book. Ginsberg would remain life-long friends with Snyder and his wife, Joanne Kyger, a distinguished writer in her own right.

This case highlights Ginsberg's post-"Howl" photographs of the various individuals who became associated with the Beat Generation movement.



Jack Kerouac, Villa Muneria, Tangier, 1957

William Burroughs, Tangier, 1957

Jack Kerouac, Tangier, 1957

Jack Kerouac, Tangier, 1957

Jack Kerouac, Peter Orlovsky, and William Burroughs, Tangier, 1957

Peter Orlovsky, India, 1962

Gregory Corso, 9 Git le-couer (Beat Hotel), Paris, 1957

Gregory Corso, Kettle of Fish, New York City, 1995

Gary Snyder, Cascade Mountains, Washington State, 1965

Peter Orlovsky, Gregory Corso, and Herbert Huncke, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders' studio, New York City, 1992

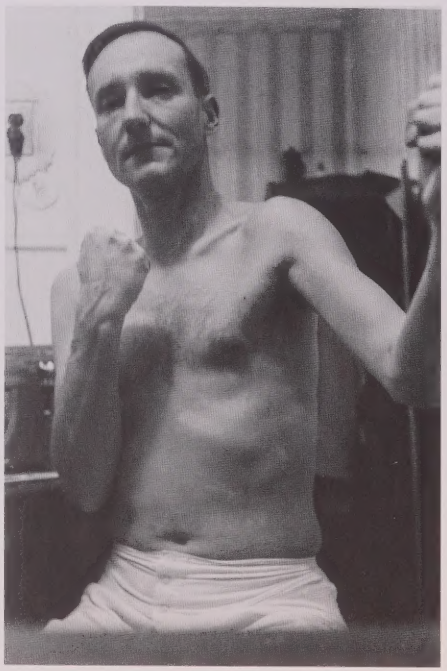
CASE SIX - WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

When Allen Ginsberg first met William Burroughs, through Lucian Carr, he purportedly was not overly impressed with the tall, thin, and well-dressed man, thinking him a somewhat stodgy, old fellow. (He was a dozen years older than Ginsberg.) However, after hearing Carr's story about how he had initiated a fight between David Kammerer and an artist (resulting in Carr biting them both), Burroughs did astound Ginsberg by quoting from memory a line from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: " 'tis too starved a subject for my sword." This would portend what would eventually become a lifelong intimate and symbiotic relationship between Burroughs and Ginsberg.

The scion of a prominent family – his family owned the Burroughs Corporation, a major American manufacturer of business equipment which could trace its routes back to the 1880s – William studied at Harvard University in the 1930s. However he did nothing with his degree upon graduation, and drifted for many years until he landed in New York City in the early 1940s, where he met Ginsberg and Kerouac. He began living a colourful, but somewhat downtrodden, life, which included heavy drug use and selling heroin to support his habit. He met and married Joan Vollmer, and moved to Texas and eventually Mexico. Tragedy soon befell. During a drunken game of William Tell (Burroughs was always fascinated with guns, right up until his death), he accidently shot and killed Volmer. (Burroughs later maintained that he accidently dropped the gun, causing it to misfire.) While awaiting trial, he began to write the manuscript which would eventually become the novel *Queer*. He fled Mexico and was convicted in absentia, and sentenced to a two-year suspended sentence.

Outside of his relationship with Peter Orlovsky, Ginsberg's most important association was with Burroughs. He looked upon him with great and deep affection, a love which was reciprocated by the elder Burroughs. They were occasional lovers during their early acquaintanceship, but their relationship would eventually become a true intellectual companionship. Burroughs was an early and important teacher for Ginsberg, often providing him with recommendations of books to read and study. In turn, Ginsberg was a proud and early champion of Burroughs' writing. He had long been impressed with Burroughs's style demonstrated in his letters, and was largely responsible for the publication of Burroughs' first book, *Junkie*, acting as the book's editor and literary agent. A largely autobiographical work about Burroughs's drug use, authored under the pseudonym "William Lee", it was published in 1953 by Ace Books, an imprint owned by the uncle of Carl Solomon, largely at Ginsberg's insistence. Burroughs would go on to write over twenty books, including *Naked Lunch*, which with *Howl* and *On the Road* are considered the three essential works of the Beat Generation. Burroughs himself became a leading cult figure of the counter culture movement.

As evidenced in this case, Burroughs was an important photographic subject for Ginsberg, beginning in the late 1940s and running through to the 1990s. As one of his oldest and most important friends, Burroughs seemed to allow Ginsberg to pry into his world via the camera lens, revealing the true portrait of this legendary figure.

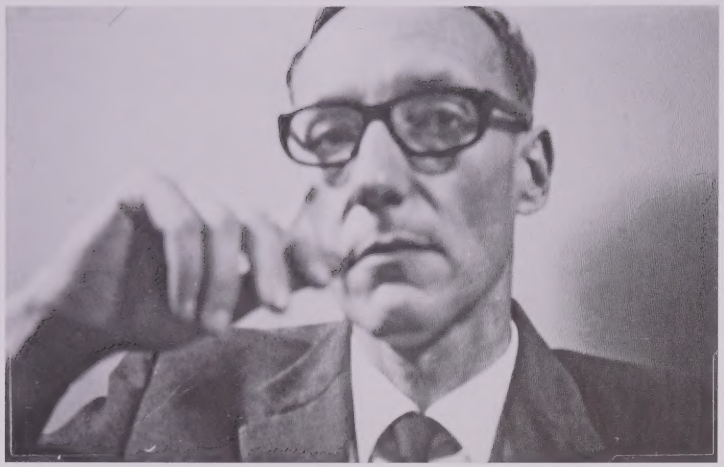


William Burroughs, Tangier, 1957

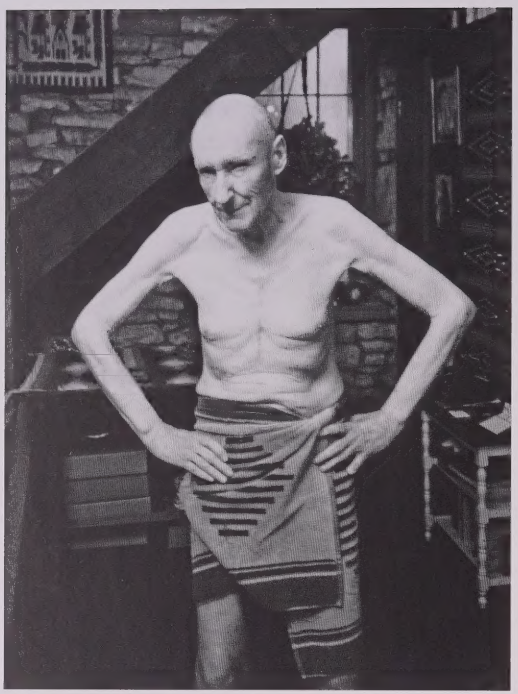
William Burroughs and Alene Lee, New York City, 1953

William Burroughs, 206 E 7th Street, New York City, 1953

William Burroughs with Alene Lee, New York City, 1953



William Burroughs, [1961?]



William Burroughs, 1992

William Burroughs back view, 1992

William Burroughs, Lawrence, KS, 1991

CASE SEVEN – PORTRAITS

Show the hands: that was the advice Robert Frank, one of the greatest of photographic artists, gave to his friend Ginsberg in the 1980s. At the time, Ginsberg's original early photographs of the Beats were being rediscovered and displayed in galleries. With Frank's steady encouragement, Ginsberg was keen to try his hand again at photography.

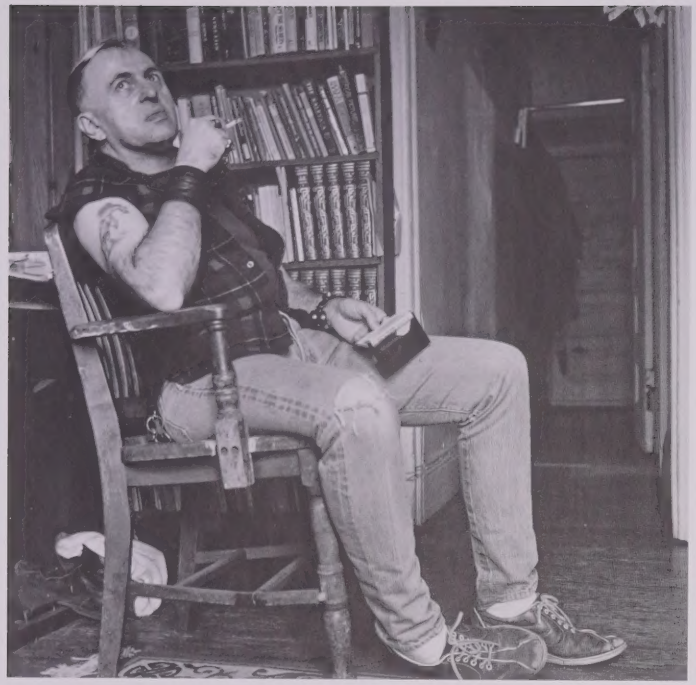
One area where Ginsberg particularly excelled as a photographer was portraiture. Moreover, as much as his photographic portraits reveal the subjects, they also tell something of the photographer too: they capture Ginsberg's celebrity, and the world of other artistic celebrities which he inhabited. It was comprised of disparate individuals, from fellow artists and writers, to other less-well-known friends and young men that he courted. It was an inclusive world.

This case displays some of Ginsberg's best portrait photography. It consists of some well-known friends, such as Anne Waldeman and Elsa Dorfman, but also other individuals that were part of his world, including musicians like Beck and Bono.

Bono, 1993

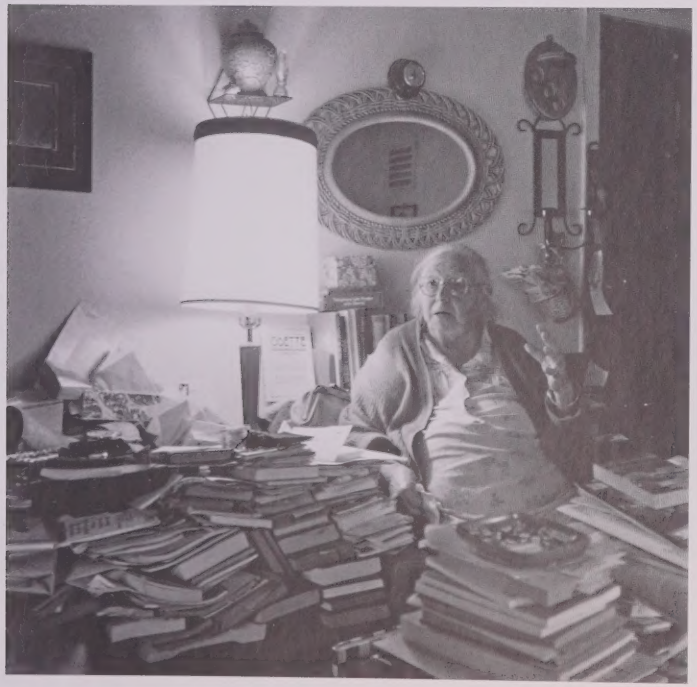
Sinead O'Connor, Sin-é Club, NY, 1992

Anne Waldman, 1986

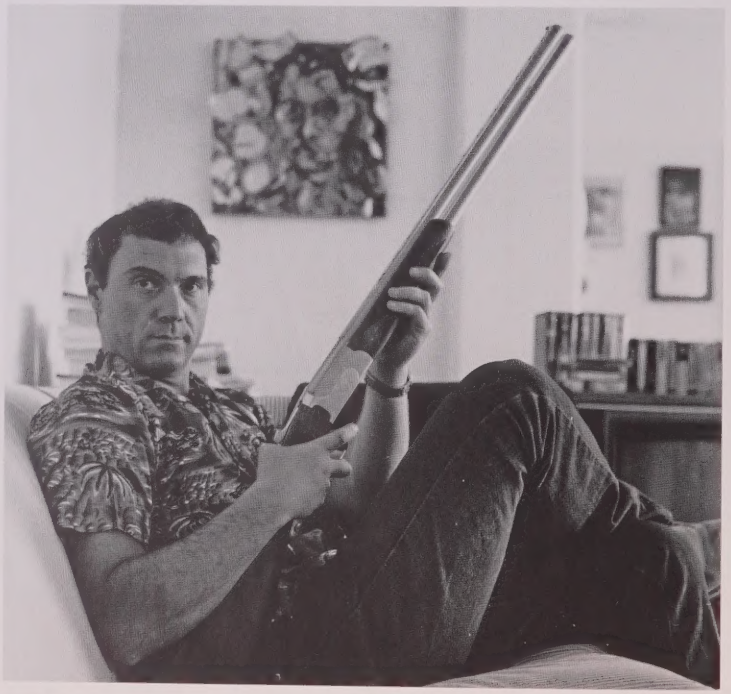


Poul Borum, 1985

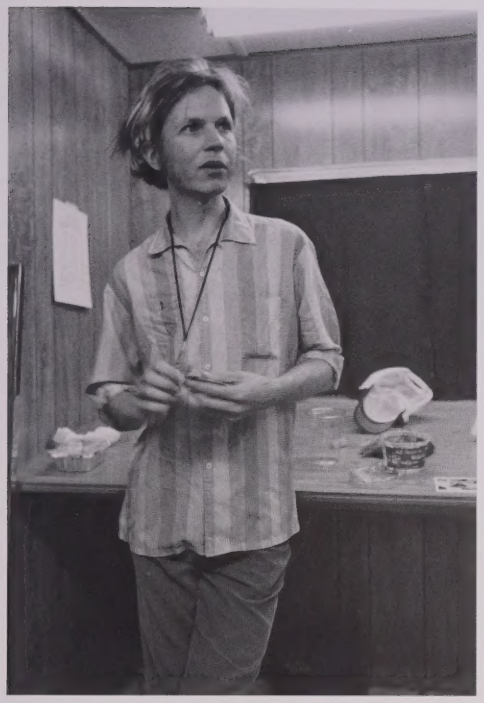
Barbara Rubin, London, 1965



Lois Hennessey Snyder, 1988



Sandro Chia, 1985



Beck, 1995

Warren Beatty and Madonna, 1989

Elsa Dorfman, 1986

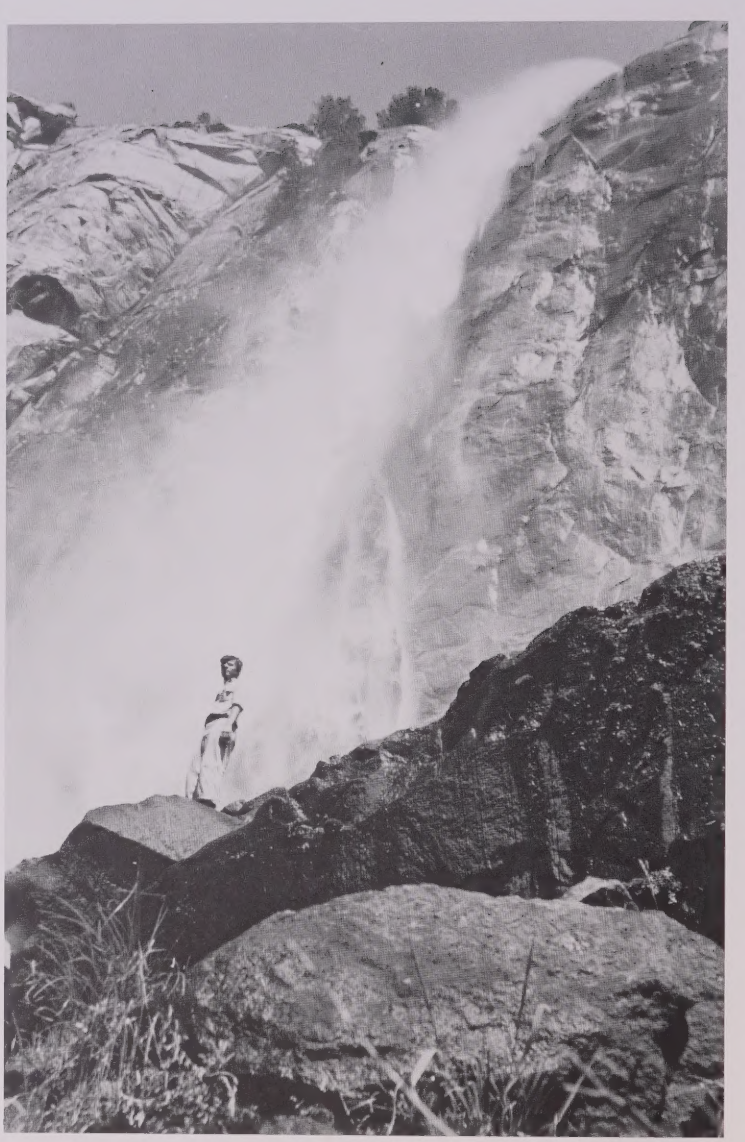
Roy Lichtenstein, 1995

CASE EIGHT – GINSBERG AS PHOTOGRAPHER

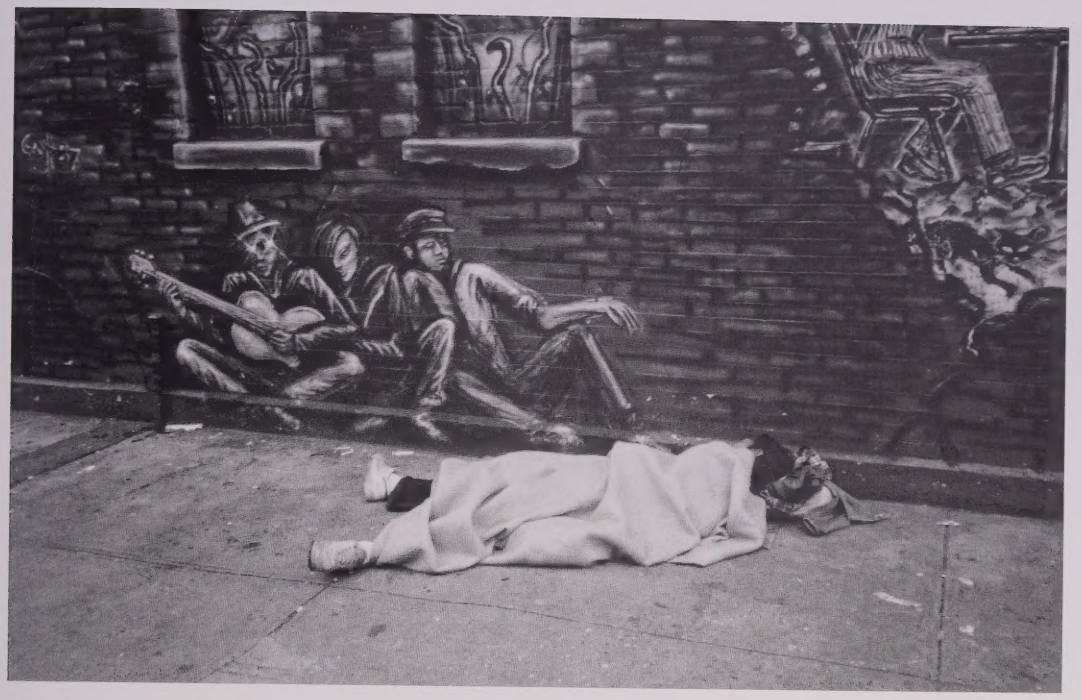
By his own account, Allen Ginsberg did not consider himself a true "artistic" photographer, particularly on the level of his good friend Robert Frank. Rather, his work, notably the early iconic photographs of the Beats, exist as documentation: they capture not just a moment in time, but also the love he had for friends like William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. "I took the photos not to show others, but as keepsakes of my own total sacramental, personal interest in intimate friends," he writes in the book *Snapshot Poetics: A Photographic Memoir of the Beat Era*.

Still, many of his photographs, even those early pictures, possess a keen artistic eye, which perhaps should not come as a surprise. After all, Ginsberg's sensibilities, as seen through his poetry, is unique and candid, grounded in a true sense of honesty and humanity. His photography often displays these same characteristics.

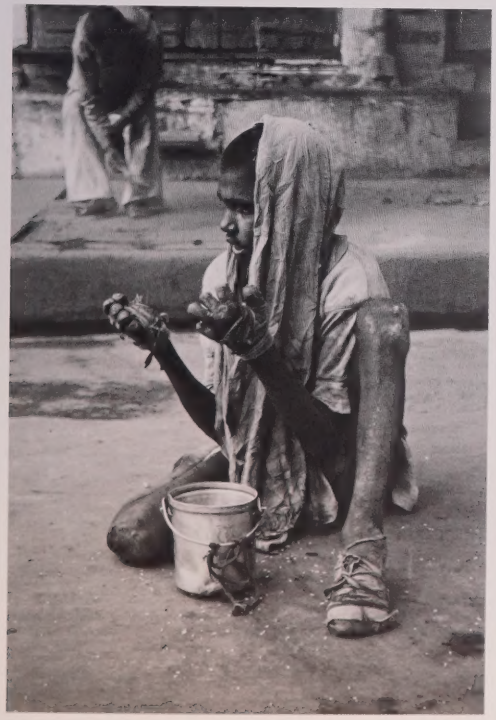
This case highlights some of Ginsberg's most interesting and artistic photographs, even if the initial intent was not artistic. It could be argued that this lack of artistic self-consciousness is what provides the power in these images. Ginsberg had a particular sensibility and understanding of poverty and of the less fortunate, displayed in a number of street scenes in New York City as well as in India. Also highlighted are candid and spontaneous shots of various individuals.



Peter Orlovsky, Yosemite, 1956

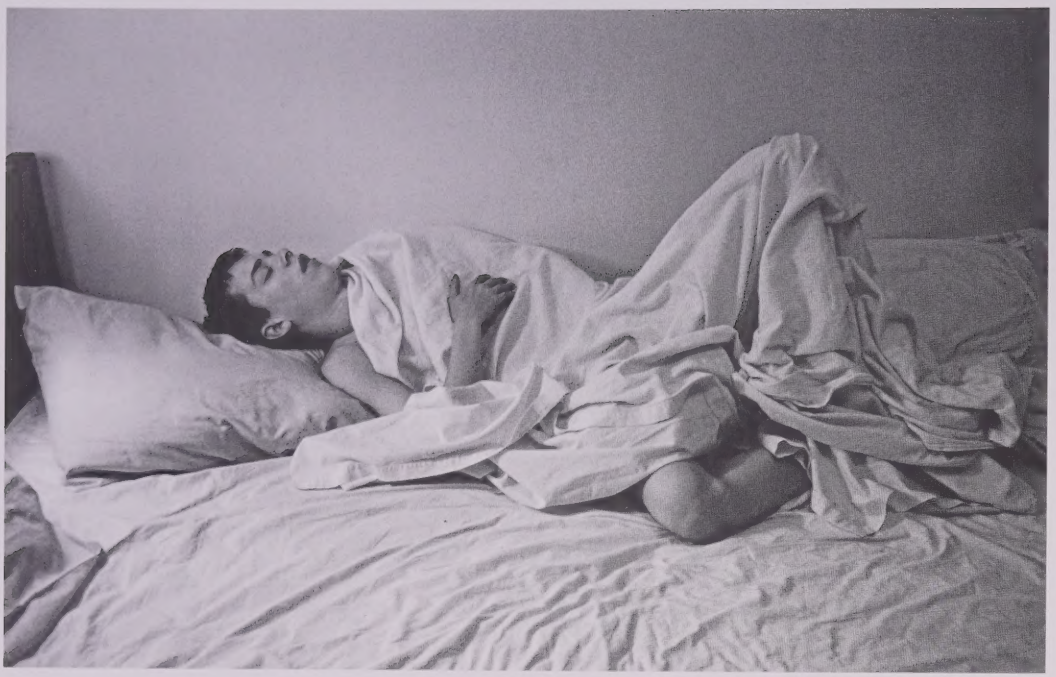


Homeless man sleeping, New York City, 1989



Fingerless boy, Calcutta, 1962

East Side sidewalk, New York City, 1993



Mark Ewert, 1989

Mark Ewert and friend, 1986

Part Two: The Interviews

Allen Ginsberg's photographs tell a story, and the captions he would routinely add to the prints enhance that narrative. There are missing voices, however, to the overall tale: those who worked intimately with Ginsberg and the photographs, from the time of the rediscovery of the early photographs from the 1950s in the mid-1980s, through the next decade leading to Ginsberg's death when photography became a more serious endeavour to the poet.

The five individuals interviewed here played key roles in the emergence and acceptance of Allen Ginsberg as a serious and legitimate photographer. They are an important part of the legacy of the photographs.

The interviews have all been edited for length and clarity.

Peter Orlovsky (b. 1933-) visiting his family — Lafcadio then aged 47 had lived with us in S.F. & N.Y. from 1955-'61 & later years intermittently; Mother Katherine Orlovsky aged 78 totally deaf after botched mastoid operation N.Y. Eye & Ear Hospital 1933, drunken surgeon; Laff's twin sister Marie who'd stayed with Peter & me East 2'd Street Lower East Side 1959 while attending baby-nurse school in Jersey, later quit hospital for angry hearing other nurse voices' "filthy gossip" about Dad and My Brother mid-Sixties Robert Frank film on Orlovskys. From second floor flat on lonely Cottontail Road they called taxi for any heavy shopping with Social Service Indemnity checks at supermarket a mile away in Center Moriches, Long Island July 26, 1987. Allen Ginsberg

Bob Rosenthal

Bob Rosenthal first met Allen Ginsberg in the mid-1970s, when he and his wife helped the poet secure an apartment in the New York City building where they were then living. He started doing some part-time work for Ginsberg in 1977, eventually becoming his full-time secretary in 1979, a job in which he remained until Ginsberg's death in 1997. Often referred to as Ginsberg's "right-hand man," his main role was to handle the increasing amount of administrative tasks associated with what some called "the Ginsberg cottage industry." From the mid-1980s onward, when the Ginsberg photographs were being rediscovered, that role included dealing with the business of the photographs.

Rosenthal, who eventually became a high school teacher, is still involved in the Ginsberg legacy. He recently completed a manuscript of his years working with Ginsberg, titled *Straight Around Allen*, which he hopes to publish soon.

This interview took place in March 2017 at the 13th St. office of the Allen Ginsberg Trust in New York City.

What's your earliest memory of the Ginsberg photos?
When I came in to work with Allen, the deal was to save everything. Don't throw anything out. Information storage and retrieval was a big thing for him. That's why I existed: he had an office with lots of files. Totally idiosyncratic files too: FBI files, the censored papers retrieved through the Freedom of Information Act, that kind of stuff. Everything went into bags, all the business and literary mail, crazy letters, mad letters. Andreas Brown was his agent, and he said, "We'll just come and pick up these boxes and bags, put a value on them, and send the shipment to Columbia University Special Collections."

All the photographs got put in and sent up: the drugstore prints, as Allen coined them, along with the negatives in the envelopes and the contact sheets. They were up there for safe keeping. But Columbia did not invest in it. It was on deposit, and they assumed Allen would gift it to them. Everybody that was doing a book on the Beats would

go up to Columbia and sift through the photographs, and perhaps put a few prints in their pockets. The vintage prints walked. So we had no catalogue of what was up there.

Raymond Foye goes up, and he sees that it's in disarray. So he spends some time up there to support his work, and he puts it into order. But then when the next ten people come to look at the photos, it goes out of order again. Later, [Ginsberg bibliographer] Bill Morgan catalogued the images and made it stick. Raymond recognized the importance of these photographs at Columbia. He made the Holly Solomon show happen, and that was the resurgence of Allen as a photographer. And Raymond did some of the first prints.

Was Allen getting paid when the photographs were being used?
I started the compensation around the time, I initiated user fees, for things like a photo being using for cover art. For a Viking book, for example, we'd charge $400. I was just trying to pay for my salary. I think I asked someone else, perhaps Elsa [Dorfman], who sold prints to books, what a decent price would be.

Where did the idea of captioning of the photographs come from?
I actually don't know the genesis of the captions. I wouldn't be surprised if Raymond had suggested it. He probably said, "Why don't you write something, you're Allen Ginsberg." Allen had a native intelligence that goes far beyond anything I could comprehend. He could see this was his way of becoming a photographer: to caption them, make them personal. I know that when it comes to stuff that gets written about with Allen: it's that sacramental sense of friendship that's in his photographs. So when he takes a picture of Jack Kerouac in the 1950s on the fire escape, Jack isn't thinking of, "Look how iconic I am," but he's just smoking a cigarette and he's thinking, "There's my dear friend Allen, and I'm posing for him."

It was at a show years later, and a young lady from the Midwest was coming to interview Allen, so I suggested she come to the opening. She comes up to me later and says "I just met Jack Kerouac." Oh god, this is crazy. "What do you mean, show me." And it was a picture of Jack, it was the silver gelatin print, and it communicated Jack Kerouac to her. The viewer becomes Allen. That's something you see with the photographs, you see his world, you become Allen in his shows, you see his friends. It's that direct communication. Then with the captions, it's consistent with his collection of poetry with the footnotes. As if he's saying, "what will people need to know in fifty years, what will they need to know in a hundred years." And then he adds that. And then being wily, he wants to put in some literary tidbit, a little artifact that makes the captions worth reading.

Would the captions change much then, the more he was captioning? Especially some of the iconic ones which he must have captioned dozens of times.
Sometimes the difference would be the change of an adjective, a tweaking, but sometimes something will come up and it gets longer and longer. They all build on each other. Writing about it is the memory of the sacred. This is what the prints represent. But those silver gelatin prints, they have an eternal etching to them, and the way the eyes look, the communication is so strong. So for Allen, I think it was a great match, the photos with the captions: he's able to look back on his life, but in a very progressive way.

In your view, was Allen a good photographer?
He absolutely had a gifted eye, but it wasn't necessarily unique. Allen himself was unique, so it was Allen taking the picture. He understood that Robert [Frank] was great, Bernice [Abbott] was great, but he didn't articulate it. There was no photographic art theory coming out of Allen, at least until later and with the Twelve Trees Press photography book [*Allen Ginsberg Photographs*].

In many ways, Allen is capturing relationships through his photography, particularly the early ones of the Beats.
Allen is looking at Bill Burroughs, and thinking "I love him, and I don't live in a world of love, but I want to hold on to this love. I'll take a picture of it." He's using a brownie camera, a girl-scout type camera. He had better cameras soon after. I've had discussions with presenters about this. He always told me, although maybe this is an alternative fact, he had a brownie. A little box camera, a one-button click. That remains a question. But it's certainly an early camera, and he certainly didn't think of himself as a photographer. These were snapshots. Beautiful moments where they're play-acting. He did understand this idea that his friendships were sacred, and that's unusual for a young man or woman to realize. That's what sort-of makes Allen kind of simple: he takes these photographs, like the picture of Neal [Cassady] and Natalie [Jackson] under the *Wild Ones* marquee, one cannot be more contrived, only Allen can take that photograph and get away with it.

Some of the most moving photographs in the collection are of William Burroughs – would you agree?
Burroughs is Allen's biggest topic. He was the longest-serving, most complete, deepest, best story kind-of topic. My favourite Burroughs is a picture of him on the rooftop with Alene Lee, and they're touching. And it's William being totally tender, and you don't see William being tender, especially with women. But Alene was special. I've never seen anybody else get that picture of William. That was during the time of [Kerouac novel's] *The Subterraneans*, when Alene was there [she was the character Mardou in the novel].

With Allen's photography, most people still seem most interested in those early photographs of the Beats.

That's just a fascinating association of people – Allen, Jack, Gregory [Corso], and William Burroughs – because they were all so different from each other. It's a literary movement in that they're writing with candor – and they complement and respect each other. But it's not a style movement; it's a candor movement. Burroughs strips away all the veneers, so does Allen, and Kerouac just goes beyond it, his prose is on a different level.

As he gets older and starts to take more photographs – remember, he's already taken the iconic photographs – he can't go back and take Jack Kerouac on the fire escape. But with the captions, he can walk back to that moment, and the caption for that fire escape photo gets longer and longer, so the print gets more and more narrow.

The photography aspect of Allen seemed to grow more important over time, would you agree with that?
Allen is a persona. The photographs are not his poetry, but they are part of his persona. It's his life as a social activist. But he's also this other guy – he's Irwin [Allen's given first name]. That's why I think the photographs are so key to complete his world and were such a major focus to his life. I think he understood how visual the age is, even though he didn't really watch TV, he didn't really go to the movies and he didn't really like theatre all that much. He liked art events; he liked painters and photographers. I see photography as a major work of his.

It isn't that his poetry is getting less important or proficient, but he has to work harder to write poetry. Whereas the photographs, they demanded to be taken.

I hear stories of Allen always carrying his camera around.
From the mid-1980s onward, he was always carrying his camera. The cameras changed, they got smaller and simpler, and as his diabetes affected his eyesight, we got him a self-focusing one.

Robert Frank must have been a big influence on Allen's photography.
Robert Frank was always there; they were good friends. Robert would never say you could make money with photography. Robert totally hates success that way. I think he liked that purity about Allen.

But unlike other photographers, like Frank, Allen didn't seem to be interested in learning about the mechanics of photography, learning what the cameras could do, for example.
Allen never learns the mechanics of photography. For instance, the first Leica he purchased was exactly the model that Robert used for *The Americans*. But the Tri-X film he was purchasing for it was a slightly different size, so one had to trim the leader. That was too much for Allen, so we had to load the film for him. So finally he bought a Leica that was more modern, and the film would easily feed. But that's okay, for him it's not about understanding depth of field. I never heard him talk about light, and every other photographer I knew would talk about light, they don't talk about anything else. "I have to go out now, there's this incredible light out." Allen didn't think of that.

Did he have an overall philosophy of photography? Did he ever talk about it?
No, he just took pictures. He was trying different things. He started to branch out with different cameras: he bought a Rolleiflex, for example. He would sometimes carry two or three cameras with him, and he'd annoy people by taking their photograph, by making them sit still. Like that great picture of Peter Orlovsky's family where they all look miserable. Well, he made them look miserable! He made them sit for fifteen minutes or whatever. He was doing what he needed to do to get the photograph. He wanted everybody in focus, he wanted their attention to the camera and to him, and it can be like herding cats, if it was Peter's family. But he makes it happen, and they're all trying to honor Allen and do what he says. Because it's Allen.

Raymond Foye

Raymond Foye has worn many hats over the years: author, editor, small press publisher, art curator. His personal connection with the Beats goes back to his youth in the late 1960s in Lowell, Massachusetts, where one of the homes on his newspaper delivery route included that of Jack Kerouac's.

Foye studied art in Chicago and then San Francisco, where he also worked as an editor at City Lights Books. He continued to stay in touch with Ginsberg, and eventually moved back to New York City in the early 1980s, where he helped work on a number of different projects with the poet. This work would eventually lead to his great Ginsberg legacy: the rediscovery of Ginsberg's photographs, and launching Ginsberg into the photographic artistic world.

This interview was conducted in March 2017, in New York in a coffee shop on 23rd St., a couple of blocks east from the famed Chelsea Hotel where Foye lives.

You knew Allen even before you started working with the photographs. How did your role with the photos begin?
I met Allen in 1973 when I was sixteen, and a junior at Lowell High School. I went with the senior English honors class to a Kerouac symposium held at Salem State College, in Massachusetts. My English teacher, a lovely woman named Rita Sullivan, allowed me to go with the senior class even though I was a junior, because she knew I was reading Kerouac. Peter Orlovsky and Gregory Corso were also there, as was Peggy Biderman, a close friend of Gregory's who lived at the Chelsea Hotel. Eventually all these people became very close friends. Somehow I managed to stay in touch with them as I was growing up and travelling around.

I worked at City Lights Books in San Francisco from 1977 to 1979, and renewed my acquaintance with Allen there. When I moved to New York in 1979, I worked freelance as an assistant to Allen on various projects. At one point he paid me as his assistant to go up to his archives at Butler Library at Columbia University – he wanted some items, so I had to go up and retrieve them. Now this was 1984, and I was twenty-seven.

I had a letter from him which I presented to Kenneth Lohf, head of Special Collections at Butler Library. I started going through the boxes of materials, and in the course of my search I encountered all of these photographs and negatives in drugstore envelopes. In those days you'd send the film to the drugstore to be developed and you'd get the prints back, with the negatives. They were not good prints, but I could see right away that the negatives were good: mostly well exposed, and in most cases they were 2 ¼ inch square, or 2¼ by 3¼ inches, a less common format. I was familiar with some of the photos from Ann Charters' book *Scenes Along the Road,* and also in her biography of Kerouac. The photos had been reproduced here and there, but not well. They were just treated as snapshots.

I had studied photography at the Philadelphia College of Art with Ray Metzker, and at the Art Institute in Chicago for a semester with

Ken Josephson, and later at the San Francisco Art Institute with Linda Connor, so I knew photography. I knew how to shoot, I knew how to print, I knew darkroom work, all of that. I could tell just by looking that these were very good negatives. When I got back to his office I said to Allen, "I'd like to take some of these negatives out of your archive and make really good prints from them." He said ok, so that was another letter, another permission. These things still belonged to Allen, they were only on deposit. For many years Allen was hoping Columbia would purchase his archives. Since Allen was a famous alumnus it seemed like the right place for the materials. But they never did make the purchase, which was a terrible missed opportunity, in my view. In any case, I removed a small selection of negatives – they were the classic 1953 shots of the apartment on East 7th Street with Kerouac and Burroughs. There were darkrooms for rent by the hour on West 20th Street that I regularly made use of. I spent a couple of days doing nice, large prints, 11x14, on Agfa Brovira paper, put them in a box, and brought them to Allen's apartment, spread them out and showed them to him. And it was a revelation to him: he had no idea that he had this kind of material, that they were that good, and that they could be blown up like that. I said, "If you were to caption these, they'd be really great and we could sell them." Allen was always very enterprising and so was I. So he started writing captions, and we experimented with a lot of different kinds of ink, a lot of different kinds of pens. The Montblanc pen worked well, and I got Allen to start putting captions underneath them. I thought they would be marketable and saleable. I knew they were beautiful and I knew they were important, and I knew they could be shown. Actually I didn't have much practical experience with that side of things, but I had hopes that we could sell them.

So the idea behind captioning the photos came from you?
The caption idea came from Elsa Dorfman: she published a book called *Elsa's Housebook*. That was one of those books I owned when I was young. Fred McDarrah's *The Beat Scene* was another one. I'd just sit there and look at the pictures and dream about hanging out with Beats. "How can I hang out with them? How can I live in the Chelsea Hotel?" It was all such a dream that I had. I love *Elsa's Housebook*. It was a great book, the way she put the captions underneath. Allen's handwriting was very similar. I knew he could be great at captions because he loved summing things up in a very precise way. And it amplified the picture: the captions were not derivative; they were parallel, a separate thing.

Obviously the captions are such a unique element of those photographs, particularly the early iconic ones of the Beats.
With the captions, they reminded him of things that he otherwise wouldn't have been reminded of. He was teaching and was rereading things like Kerouac's *Visions of Cody*, but seeing the photographs definitely jogged his memory. The captions became an art form in themselves, and he started making sure they kept copies of all the captions. They went from becoming haiku-like, just a line or two, to being more epic – sometimes they'd be longer than the size of the photograph. Of course every time you remember something, what you're really doing is remembering the last time you remembered it. And that then becomes a palimpsest. It does change.

You helped arrange the first gallery showing of the Ginsberg photographs?
Yes. The first show was at Holly Solomon's in January 1984. I would guess it was spring that I went up to Butler Library, and the summer when I was doing the printing. By this time I was borrowing a darkroom on Fulton Street – it was summer and extremely hot in the dark room, I remember that – then by the fall I went to Holly Solomon with these photographs. I knew Holly, I liked her, and the Director of her gallery was Manuel Gonzalez. He was originally from Cuba; he was full of energy and very intelligent.

It's difficult to remember why I decided to take them to Holly – I knew she would like them. It seemed right for her, and I was friends with Manuel. At the time Holly showed Laurie Anderson, William Wegman, Nam June Paik. There was a little backroom in the space in the gallery and they liked to do two-person shows. So I went up to 724 Fifth Avenue with a box of photos and showed them to Manuel and to Holly and said, "Can you do a show?" And they were like, "Yeah, great, let's do it." We didn't have a budget for framing or matting, so we just put them behind glass and pinned the glass to the wall with clips. We filled the back room with photos. At the last minute, Allen took a marker and wrote a line on the wall from his

poem "Footnote to Howl." The line was "Hideous Human Angels," and that became the name of the show.

We installed the show on a Thursday, and the show opened on a Saturday. And between that time, the gallery called around, and word got out in the press, and Allen of course was a one-man press agent. That opening was so packed. I don't remember whose show was in the front room. We completely overwhelmed whoever was in that front room.

Before the opening I said to him, pointing to the photographs in the shows, "You know Allen, this is all well and good, but this is 1953 and this is 1957 and this is 1963, and there isn't anything after 1965." So I said, "Go buy a camera, start shooting again." He said, "Oh, okay, great." He went to Robert Frank, and asked Robert to take him to a camera store. Imagine that! But Robert was just around in those days, nothing special, just hanging around. Unless you were a photography student like myself and happened to know that this is a man who singlehandedly changed the face of photography, if you saw him, you'd think he was just a bum on the street. He was very demure, he was not seeking the spotlight, he did not go to things that were public. It was a very different world in those days, the media was not so involved in branding everything every minute of the day. Of course to some of us, Robert was a very important underground filmmaker and photographer. But you could bump into him on the Bowery, and you could hang out with him at his studio on Bleecker Street, and everything was cool as long as you didn't make a big fuss about him being Robert Frank. I spent a lot of time at his place, we'd smoke pot, we'd listen to Dylan and Van Morrison and Neil Young. One day after I'd passed some sort of test I guess, he took down a box, showed me the contact sheets to *The Americans*. I'll never forget that.

Did the Ginsberg photos sell well? Or at least as you initially thought they would?
They did. They weren't too expensive. One thing I did do, prior to that show, to raise money to be able to buy supplies and dark room time and pay myself a little bit, I put together two sets of a hundred prints. He captioned every one and I tried to sell those sets for $5,000 each. Robert Rainwater at the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library bought one set. He jumped right on it. But I couldn't get anyone else interested. A lot of institutions – the Getty, the Met, the MoMA – I took them everywhere I could think of, they all turned me down. One hundred signed photographs for $5,000, in retrospect, not bad. We never sold that second set. But with the Berg sale, that's how I was able to finance the printing.

You were involved with the Twelve Trees Press book, Allen Ginsberg Photographs, *as well?*
Yes, I was friends with Jack Woody from Twelve Trees, and I engaged him in that project. He was doing beautiful photography books with Herb Ritts and Robert Mapplethorpe. In many ways Jack Woody invented the contemporary photography book aesthetic as we now know it. Certainly, Minor White and Michael Hoffman got the ball rolling at Apeture, but Jack Woody upped the scale, and gave even greater prominence to really fine gravure printing. So Jack came by Allen's house, and in a few hours we put together that book of photographs.

And then Allen really got into the photography, which is something that a lot of people had a hard time forgiving me for because he became so obsessed. I remember at the time, those around him like his secretary Bob Rosenthal, they loved Allen and supported him, anything he wanted to do was fine, but Allen was spending a lot of money and a lot of time on the photography. It was an expensive hobby, and it was a lot of work for everyone in the office. But in retrospect it was far more than a hobby. And he became a real nuisance with that camera. I'm joking, but he really did get in everybody's face all the time. But because he was Allen Ginsberg, people put up with him, they were honoured to have that attention paid, they would cooperate. Even Dylan would sit still for him. That's part of the magic of the portraits: *the subject is being photographed by Allen Ginsberg*, they are interacting with someone whom they deeply admire.

Robert Frank was obviously an important influence for Allen.
For most people I knew, Allen was a real hero, but Allen had his own heroes, and Robert was certainly one of them. Allen worshipped Robert. So the photography was a way for him to bond with Robert,

and to be his student. He had another friend who was a photographer, who lived above Strand Books, Hank O'Neal. He was the commercial agent for Bernice Abbott. He was another person whom Allen relied on for help and advice. Through Hank, Allen met Bernice. She was in her eighties by then. She had kind of an imperious quality, very gruff and blunt, and she'd tell him off. He wanted to take a photograph of her, he'd be jumping all around, and she'd say, "Allen, slow down. Don't be a shutterbug, compose your picture." She taught him about composition. I remember Robert once when Allen was doing a portrait of somebody, he said, "Allen, try to get the hands in as well. If you can get the hands in as well as the face, you can tell twice as much about a person." He was getting little pointers. And he would always be asking about film speeds and aperture, figuring it out. You see, Allen wasn't just a great teacher, he was a great student as well.

He was also purchasing better cameras too, from what I understand.
Yes. He had a small Olympus at first but once we got going, he began buying better cameras, a Leica and a Rolleiflex. He was going to camera stores with Robert Frank. I went with them once to a place called Olden Cameras upstairs on Herald Square. Robert was very careful when it came to examining the lenses. "The camera is just a box," he told Allen. "It's the lens that counts. Photography is about optics." Robert went for Zeiss lenses but they had to be from certain years, when Carl Zeiss himself was still making them.

So he was interested in some of the mechanics of the camera?
He was usually more interested in simply taking the photo, but he had to learn some of the mechanics. He couldn't have gotten the good photos [without that knowledge]. If you look at his photos, they are very well exposed and in focus. I sat with him and explained to him the *Minor White Zone System Manual*, how you meter – how you calculate film speeds, shutter speeds, aperture openings. It's about pre-visualizing the picture. I got him a light meter, a Weston Master 5, a classic. You could pick all this stuff up at the time in pawn shops for very little money. I showed him how it worked. Although he wasn't a gear head, Allen was a very practical person.

He obviously could see the interest the old photographs were generating. Was that part of the motivation in terms of thinking, 'Hmm maybe I should try my hand at photography?'
Absolutely. At one point he said to me, "Why did I ever stop!?" He told me he lost the camera so he just stopped. I don't think he was getting any good feedback, either. It was the appreciation and the feedback he was getting that encouraged him to continue. And then of course it very much fit in with his poetics. Allen's photographs are very much like his poems in they're extremely well observed; they are very intimate, confessional, poignant, tender, well drawn, and have great attention to detail. I always thought the photographs were a continuation of the poems. I know some of the things that thrilled Allen the most in his photography were things like that scene in his kitchen with the window open, and the drapes blowing. He was just captivated by that photograph. He shot that image over and over down through the years. The magic of the ordinary moment.

I remember once we were looking through a Bernice Abbott book, and there's a picture of 42nd St. and 5th Ave. by her from up high. And I remember we were looking at it together and marvelling at what an absolutely magical, captivating photograph it was. Even though it's such a seemingly ordinary photograph. And I said to Allen, "It's like being on acid." And he was like, "Exactly." It just had that sacred dimension of total ordinariness. Which is really what enlightenment is supposed to be.

How do Allen's photographs fall within his work as a poet?
It was an extension of his poetic sensibility, and it was a way of interacting and engaging with people. Allen always had a strong sense of the historicity of the moment: everything was worth documenting. Why else would you save a laundry list from Kerouac, or a grocery list from Burroughs? That was a marvelous thing about Allen: he saw his friends as heroes, he perceived the mythic dimensions of everyday life. He honoured the moment. It also then became a diaristic endeavor, the day-to-day flow, the quotidian. That's a book I would like to see done, that I would really like to do, since the greatest hits approach has been done. We've seen the perfect, isolated images over and over. I'd like to see a big thick book that would have five thousand images, page after page. Before Allen's negatives went off

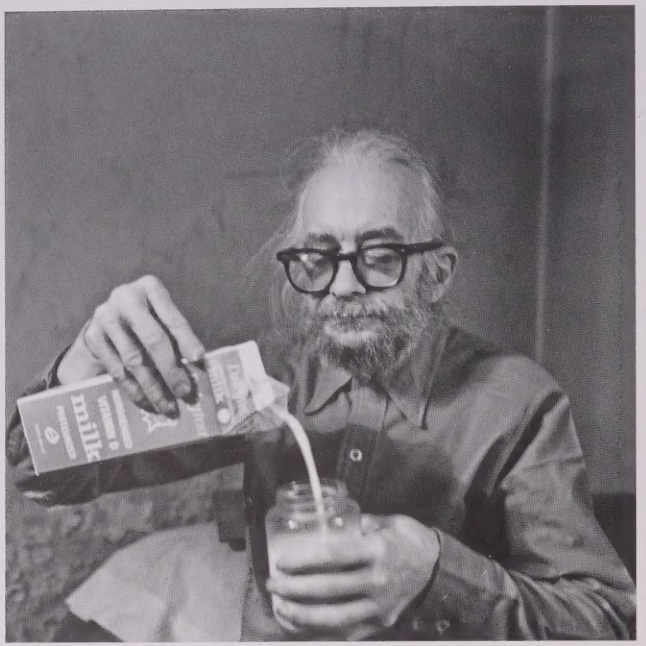
to Stanford University, I went through all of the contact sheets because I wanted to make prints of things that I had an emotional connection with. I wanted pictures of myself, or myself with certain people. That experience of going through all of the negatives and contact sheets made me aware of the day-to-day story that the photographs tell. That's the book I would like to see.

You stopped printing the photos.
At a certain point, I just couldn't keep printing, so he started to use Brian Graham, and then Sid Kaplan.
There's an argument made that unless one prints his or her own photographs, one can't be considered a serious photographer, that it lessens the photographs. Do you agree?
That's one perspective. It depends on the photographer.

How much attention would Allen pay to the print quality?
A lot. He spent time on cropping, he wanted to see detail, he began to understand how detail in shadow areas might be brought out, he understood about burning and dodging. And then at a certain point, there came a process where one could actually somehow redevelop negatives and pull more information out of them. Because there were some things that were taken in very, very dark situations, some of the photos of Kerouac and Burroughs horsing around. At a certain point, Sid Kaplan went back into those negatives, reprocessed them chemically, and got prints that showed you twice as much as you'd ever seen before, and that was very exciting.

He definitely knew a good print when he saw it. Allen loved going around to artists' studios, he loved going to galleries. He spent a lot of time at [artist] Francisco Clemente's loft, he knew artists from the past like Larry Rivers, Rauschenberg. And he had a real sense of the art. Allen was always going to jazz clubs, and underground films. He was into all this counter culture stuff, in a way that Burroughs and the others were not.

How long then were you involved with the Ginsberg photographs?
I segued out of it at a certain point, sometime after the first couple of shows. I had other things going on, and frankly there wasn't enough money to be made strictly from Allen's photography. I was happy to



lend a hand and check in and be around, but the office began to be capable of handling things. And I didn't need to be involved day to day. He named me in his will as an advisor to his estate, in particular regarding the photography. But they never asked me, and I didn't feel like intruding.

Do you have some favourites from the collection?
I love the Harry Smith photos. He really captured Harry. He nursed Harry back to health after Harry got hit by a car. Allen had lost track of Harry and one day he was in a cab on the Bowery and he saw

Harry hobbling across the street. He stopped the taxi and yelled to him, nobody had seen Harry for months and months, nobody knew where he was. Harry burned down a lot of bridges. When you disappear in New York City, you really do disappear. Allen invited Harry to live in his house and nursed him back to health. Harry would have died otherwise. Then he couldn't stand him anymore. Eventually he came to the Chelsea and I got him a room, and we got the Grateful

Dead to pay his rent. Harry was very photogenic. And he wouldn't just pose for anybody. I love those photos.

The famous photo of Harry Smith drinking milk hangs as a mural in the fancy lobby of the Ace Hotel in New York City. It's formerly the Breslin Hotel, which was more of a flophouse than a hotel at the time Smith lived there, from the late 1970s until 1984. Now people are sipping $25 cocktails and typing on their iPads, and Harry is staring down at them in that famous photo by Allen Ginsberg. I guess that's a New York story. But Harry would have liked that.

What about other photographs?
The one of Gregory Corso in Paris, in that garret, I always loved that one. The one of Burroughs typing *Naked Lunch* in Morocco. Some of the portraits of Robert Frank in his loft. He took some really great pictures of Clemente.

Do you think the photographs could stand on their own if it wasn't Ginsberg holding the camera and releasing the shutter?

That's like saying, if you take the music away from the libretto in a Wagner opera, does it stand up on its own? It's a nonsensical question because the two are one. If you were walking along the street and you found a bunch of them in the trash, would you keep them or would you save them? If you recognized the person in the photo, you probably would hold on to them; if you didn't, probably not. But what would an ordinary person do if they found a Paul Strand photograph lying in the trash? They'd probably pass it by.

Do you know how he felt about his own photographic work?
Jack on the fire escape, and Neal with Natalie Jackson under the marquee. I remember him specifically remarking, "Wow, I really captured a moment." He was impressed with himself, with those images. The ones of Kerouac and Bill pretending to wrestle with each other, holding the knives. The family portrait of the Orlovskys, the tragedy of that family, like something out of Dostoevsky. He liked that photo quite a lot.

Do you think there's anything specific that give the photos a special quality?
There's an aura of Ginsberg behind the lens. What he had was an extreme level of sensitivity. He really had an incredible antenna. He always saw the human element in things, the sadness of people, how sad people are because they're striving and lonely and hurt. He had such empathy. He also, from years of being a serious meditator, he understood the nature of the mind and perception, the texture of consciousness, he understood an awful a lot about what we see, and the mind's eye – he was a very astute observer. He was calm and poised and he confers that vibe on his subjects. He could penetrate reality with his mind. So the photographs are extremely well observed. Are they as good as Robert Frank? No. Are these as good as Elsa Dorfman? Yes, I think so. Where would I put him in relation to other photographers? He's not as much of a formalist as Richard Avedon, but his project is very similar to Avedon: he's letting the people come through. It's hard for me to be objective because I was so close to it all. The lack of aesthetic imposition is refreshing. He would never be so mundane as to chase after a style.

One photo that he always liked was a photo of me and Holly Solomon, sitting on a sofa at her apartment, taken after the opening of his first show. It's a classic Fifth Avenue apartment, cocktails and fancy art. I'm wearing an Irish tweed suit and she's all dressed up. I have a drink in my hand, and I'm laughing and she's gesturing, and he always used to say, "This is uptown society.' Allen loved going between the high and the low, which you could do in New York. He loved being down on the Lower East Side with the poets, but he also loved the uptown scene too. He had a refreshing lack of judgement that came from seeing things as they are. I suppose that is his photographic legacy.

Brian Graham

Brian Graham's journey from his birthplace of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia to New York City began in the early 1980s when he met the famed photographer Robert Frank, who for many years has spent his summers in the Maritimes. Sensing that Graham was curious about photography, Frank invited him to New York City. While he began with carpentry work at Frank's Bleeker St. apartment, it eventually led to helping Frank in the darkroom. "I learned how to print with Robert in the darkroom, which was really something," says Graham.

Graham, who now divides his time between his small East Village apartment in New York City and the southwest in France, eventually established his own reputation as both a photographer and a printer.

He began printing Allen Ginsberg's photographs soon after he met the poet, through Frank, in the mid-1980s.

This interview was conducted in late winter 2017 at Graham's apartment.

Do you remember when you first met Allen?
It was through Robert Frank that I first met Allen. He'd gotten interested in photography again and retrieved his negatives from Columbia University where they had been in storage since 1968. Raymond Foye organized everything and started working with the photos, but printing pictures wasn't really his thing. I didn't have any work at the time, so Allen and Robert say, "Well, here's a job for you." I didn't know how long it was going to last – I didn't care. I was just around doing drywall and painting, and happy to be here in New York.

I met Raymond one evening, at his place in the Chelsea Hotel. He had been making some small prints and contact sheets. He had barely touched the bulk of the material. Right away I started making small prints, and Allen, he had these little point-and-shoot cameras and he'd take more and more pictures. Pretty soon I'd be going there, to Allen's East 12th St. apartment, and he'd pass me a plastic shopping bag full of 30 rolls of film to process, to make contact sheets. I picked up my first work from Allen on April Fool's Day in 1984. I was a bit afraid to meet the big poet and say the wrong thing. He asked me, "How's the sex in Nova Scotia."

When you gave him back the contact sheets, what would he do with them?
He'd have his contact sheets, he'd look at them, and then he'd go visit Robert, and Robert would look at them and say, "Print that one, but cut this off, crop it this way." So we got doing that. And actually it was helpful to me too because that's one of the important things I learned from Robert: the whole picture, you don't need to print that. You can take out anything. Allen took his advice and gave me the notes to work from.

Allen would use different magnifying aides to study those little photos on the 8×10 inch contact sheets. But then he realized he could get them bigger, so I started to make larger 11×14 inch contact sheets. On the back of the contact sheet, he would make notes on

which images to print. That's how he used to work. He shot a lot of rolls of film – dozens of his kitchen window in all the seasons.

I assume you also worked on printing many of the iconic ones from the 1950s.
I worked on those – in the beginning, that's all I printed. There were a few new rolls at the beginning, but the first thing I did were those: Kerouac on the fire escape, the Tangier pictures, Neal Cassady and Natalie Jackson under the marquee. I printed this image many, many times, I could probably do it in my sleep.

What kind of shape were the negatives in?
A lot of people think they're scratched too much or not in good shape. At first, I would spend hours and hours spotting out the scratches, tracing them with a spotting brush. But after a while, that's the way they were and that's the character of the picture today. Some, like the Tangier pictures, were scratched a lot, lines from people handling them too much or processing them. So that's just the way they are. It doesn't bother me.

Were they difficult to print? Were they too light, too dark?
Allen always managed to do something good, better than just with a plastic camera. They were glass lenses, they were decent cameras that he took the pictures with. And he somehow knew that these pictures were going to be important. Sometimes you wonder how people know that, but of course everything was important to him; with his personal life he made it important to him.

There were a bunch of negatives that were rolled up, they were curled, and they had stayed that way, and I had to make contact sheets out of them. They were really a drag because you couldn't hold them down to put them on the glass. It was hard, and they were badly scratched. They were still printable; they were all printed.

I'm interested in Allen and his photographic "eye" – did he know what he was looking for when he was looking at a contact sheet and what he'd want printed?
Robert had a lot of influence over Allen [when it came to deciding what photos to print]. But Allen took the pictures, so he knew what

he was after. And there are a lot of good ones. He had a quirky kind of sensibility. Like the picture of Lou Reed, with the haunting poster of Samuel Beckett to the extreme left in the frame. That's kind-of a bizarre picture, but it's what he made of the opportunity he had.

Now that I look at the pictures after all this time, I'll see things I maybe didn't see before. I appreciate it more. Although he took a lot of pictures, he took them in any kind of condition. Some of the negatives were difficult to print because the light could totally be wrong. And so there were a lot of things in shadow or overexposed in other places.

Did he have any feedback when it came to the prints themselves?
Not really. I did a lot of copies of the prints when I first printed them. At the beginning, sometimes he'd ask for two or three prints of a Tangier picture. I wasn't so confident in my printing as I was only just beginning to print, so I'd print six. I'd give him three, and I'd end up with the other three. When I looked at them afterward, I couldn't really see the difference. That happens. But when the prints dry, they look ok, even passable. So I ended up with a lot of prints of these pictures. He never really questioned the quality of the prints. He just assumed they were good enough. When it says "Printed under his Supervision," that's pretty vague because he wasn't really analyzing it, looking at it in its totality.

Allen was a bit insecure in terms of determining the quality of the prints. Once I went to him and he was signing some of those prints, and I had a print that was kind of damaged, but I liked it – it was a print of Burroughs on the couch, it was a dark, dark picture. I used to use a kind of a bleach on the picture, called potassium ferrocyanide. And you could bleach out a dark area. I made mistakes a lot because it would get away on you and you could damage the print – I learned that from Robert. But I used it quite a bit, and you can make a unique looking print with it. At the top of the couch was the book *Junky*, but you couldn't see it in all the other prints, and I wanted to be able to see it in the background. Something happened to it, I left it in the developer too long. It got a little strange look to it. I brought it to Allen, it was one of the ones he was going to sign, and he looked at me and said, "Do you think that's good enough?" And I said, "Yeah, it's ok, it's different." So he wrote on it and signed it, and wrote "Brian's print." He didn't want to be associated with it. It was kind-of funny, but it's a good print. It's not perfect, but there are some things about it that are interesting. But that's the only incident I can think of where he was worried about the quality of the print. He wasn't trying to make weird, damaged stuff.

Looking back at now at the prints, it's too bad there aren't more bad prints like that one. I kept almost every reject, but none of them have that same amazing coincidence of errors.

There's an argument out there that if one doesn't print his or her own photos, they aren't a true photographer. Where would Allen then fall within this argument?
I don't have any doubt that he was a good photographer. He had talent for it. It's his photography – it's nobody else's. I mean, think of [Richard] Avedon – I'm sure he went in and told the printer what to do, but I don't think he was actually standing there when the print was being made. I learned how to print working for Allen, and through Robert as a medium. A lot of the solutions to some of the difficult negatives, I learned how to print those working with Robert. He has all kinds of difficult negatives.

From my own perspective, I think Allen's portrait photography is some of his finest work. Would you agree?
He photographed all these people that he came in contact with, that were part of his world. When Harry Smith was living with Allen, he photographed him constantly. Then there were the photographs that he took in his kitchen. It was like his own studio. He'd invite people over, off the street sometimes, and he'd just take their photo, with his Rimbauld poster ending up somewhere in the frame.

Was there a challenge when printing some of the larger format ones that he would caption?
Handling them, for sure. A bigger piece of paper, but the printing was basically the same. After you've printed them so many times though, you get to know these pictures, to know what to do. The [Jack Kerouac] fire escape image: man, I printed that a lot.

Do you have any favourites?
I tend to prefer his vertical pictures. There's a picture of Julius [Orlovsky], in the woods [St. Johnsbury Vermont], with one small branch pointing straight into the middle of his forehead, it's very perplexing. Of the classic fifties pictures, the image of Peter Orlovsky and his younger brother Lafcadio is both tender and holy.

Do you know what kind of cameras he was using? Did you get a sense of how much he knew about the camera technology?
An Olympus XA camera, and he had a couple of them. It was semi-automatic: he'd set the exposure, but it had a light meter. He had a Rolleiflex also which is medium format. He wasn't really that interested in some of the more technical aspects, but he got it most of the time. He knew after so many times of using the cameras what he was doing.

Robert [Frank] must have been a great influence on Allen.
Robert had a lot of patience with Allen and with me, with lots of people. But that's what was nice about Robert: he'd never say "forgot about it, give it up."

Was Allen becoming a better photographer over time?
I don't know if I could say better, he never really changed. It doesn't really stick in my mind that he changed any, he kept doing the same thing. Maybe he got better at getting the picture, but he took a lot of them. Everywhere he went, all evening, when he went to social

events or when he travelled to do a lecture, he'd take his camera with him. When I processed the film and made contact sheets, I knew where he was and who he was with. And then I started to know all of the people. So it was pretty interesting for me.

What was it like to work with Allen?
He was very generous with me. He was always willing to accept and be curious about what you're thinking. I'd call him up and he'd say to me, "Any blinding ideas today?" He was ready to take information from anywhere, looking for inspiration or whatever.

It sounds like a great learning experience.
It was. At the time I was learning, finding my place in the big city. I was being affected by his manner, with his nerve really, just as I was fortunate to work with the artist June Leaf or with the painter Philip Taaffe.

When Allen had a roll of film, would he snap a lot of photos?
Allen could be careful with what he was snapping, but when he got into a situation, with Paul McCartney for instance, or Dylan, he knew that that was important and he was going to take as many pictures as he could get away with. In that sense, as the photographer you have to take as many photos as you can because you're not going to get a second chance, it's not going to happen again.

Were there any variations in printing the photos over the years?
What I would try to do, I'd use a different kind of paper. The papers we had back then – Agfa, Ilford, Kodak – if I found I wasn't getting the result, if the highlights were too blown away, I'd try using different paper that was easier to print on. With his pictures, I was using multi-grade paper because I could shift filters, change the grade within the exposure. I could make it half the exposure on one grain, and then half on the other. But yeah, it changed. Also, as you gain more experience in the darkroom and talking to other printers and seeing what they were doing, how they did it, that would change how I'd print. At the beginning, I wasn't sure I was printing it right, so I'd overprint the pictures. In the end, today, they're acceptable.

Are you proud of the work you did with Allen?
I am. I think it was around 1992, I was processing all that film. And I was throwing away the film containers. And then one day I thought, "That's crazy." Because he wrote on every container. So then I started saving them. Each one is like an original poem, basically. He would give it to me like that (the metal canister in the plastic tube, both written on), and he was strict because he wanted that information on the back of the contact sheet. So right away you'd transfer that information to the back of the paper before you developed or processed. So he'd have the date, he'd have the characters, it was a great thing to have all that information. He'd sometimes write the camera he used, Leica M6. (He pulls one out). So here (reading): "Gregory Corso at Kettle of Fish bar, Greenwich Village."

Do you ever think of the legacy you left, your role in defining Allen as a photographer?
I'm linked with it. I'm stuck with it. My photography from that time shows it. I made an exhibition of my pictures and called it "Absurdity Is King," which really deals with the twilight of the Beats and the end of what I call the "absence of luxury." It was a way of life, a way of looking at the world from the perspective of the lower East Side and Glace Bay at once. I carry the life style that ensued through our friendship.

Jacqueline Gens

Long before she began working with Allen Ginsberg in the 1980s, Jacqueline Gens was inspired by the Beat writers. Discovering their work when she was in her teens, she points to Allen Ginsberg's poem "Kaddish" as one that "just rocked my world." A poet in her own right – she was a director and a founder of the Master of Fine Arts Programme in Poetry at New England College, and for many years worked at the Naropa Institute (now University) in Boulder, Colorado, where she first met Ginsberg – Gens played a crucial role when Ginsberg's photography was beginning to gain acclaim through gallery shows, reproductions in books and magazines, and with the publication of the Twelve Trees Press monograph *Allen Ginsberg Photographs*. For over six years, she acted as the primary archivist for the photography collection, along with handling much of the administrative work.

A resident of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, she was interviewed over Skype in the summer of 2017.

You knew Allen before you started working with him and his photographs, yes?
I was the assistant director with the summer writing program at Naropa, and had worked with Allen a number of times before 1987, which is when I got involved with his photography. In fact, the first time I saw his photographs, he brought a box of them printed by Sid Kaplan, and we were sitting in this mansion where he was housed, that somebody had donated for Naropa professors. I stayed with Allen that summer as kind of an overseer at this house. I still remember sitting in that elegant living room, we were all dressed up because there was going to be a party, and he was in suit and tie and I had this dress on, and he had this box, and he's showing me these photographs, and I just knew I wanted to have something to do with them. I had been quite taken with them, they had a real sacred quality to them. They were just so beautiful to me.

In the mid-1980s, he had been encouraged by Raymond Foye and Robert Frank, and there was some buzz about these photographs. He had already met with Bernice Abbott at this point. So when I came in 1987, he asked me to organize an archive of the negatives. They were having a difficult time locating the negatives because they were always being asked to produce photographs for magazines and other publications.

What interested you about the photos?
Allen just loved these guys [Burroughs and Kerouac], they were his sacred world. It went beyond his homosexuality, although there was that element too. In his later years, he always photographed ordinary people as well. I was recently reading the *New York Times* review of the National Gallery Beat show ["Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg"] that basically pans it, saying he's not a great photographer. I think the beauty of his photography collection is that his entire world is included, not just the Beats. As he grew older, he would, for example, photograph a kid at an ice cream stand, or he would photograph just street scenes.

Towards the end before I left, he was involved with all the painters like Francisco Clemente, Sandro Chia. He had entered that sort-of realm of high society, it wasn't just the literary world, it was big money; they lived in glorious lofts, and he photographed them all, as portraits. He was very magnanimous in his appreciation for others. And that's what really drew me to him as a person as well.

How did you go about setting up the photography archive?
What Allen had me do is call all the great photographers – Richard Avendon, Robert Frank – and ask them how to set up this archive. I wasn't a photographer; I knew nothing about photography. Between both of them, they suggested each negative be numbered. I couldn't really do that, so we created these funky binders with the contact sheets, which were numbered, and then there was an opposite sleeve with the negatives. For the six years or so that I worked with Allen and the photographs, that's what he used.

Did you arrange for the prints to be made as well?
Sid [Kaplan] and Brian [Graham] were the two go-tos for printing. I would hand-deliver the negatives and pick up the prints, or sometimes Sid would drop them off. So, not only did I do that, I also curated the photos for the Ginsberg film [*The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg*, directed by Jerry Aronson]. I collected all those photographs and had them printed. It was an enormous job. And we also had very large shows in Europe and Japan that I helped with, often with the curators, helping them select the photos to show. There was a lot of big money and a lot of politics around the shows. They had to be produced and curated. The photographs then had to be printed and then captions added to them. It was a lot of work, not to mention the enormous magazine requests for reproductions.

What were the logistics of the operation?
We would get an order, like maybe the Kerouac on the fire escape. I had to take them to Allen to be written on. I spent a lot of time with Allen as he would hand-write on the large prints. The photos without the signature or the caption, they are somewhat meaningless. It's the captions that enliven them and bring them to life. He couldn't just write them and have them strewn around the office. You had to hand him the photograph, then you had the pens, he had to write them and leave them to dry, and then write another photograph caption. They said I was the "photography person" in the office, but I was also the office manager. The requests were coming in at a rapid rate in an office that was very understaffed. And when I first started with Allen and working on the photographic archive, it was in Allen's tiny apartment on East 12th St., and working with the negatives and getting everything together, it was really chaotic.

The timing, the mid-1980s, seemed ideal for the rediscovery of Allen's photographs.
Allen's collected works had recently come out. That sort-of became a renewal of his fame. Of course, he was always famous: I remember when I was a teenager and I'd see him on late-night TV. But in 1985, the collected works came out, and it came out to rave reviews, so there was a renewed interest in the Beats generally, and in Allen specifically, so he began to walk around with his camera. Because of this renewal in his literary career, as Allen said in an interview once, if you're really well known in one art, people might take you seriously in another art, and that's what happened [with the photography].

He took his camera because he had been encouraged by Robert Frank and Bernice Abbott. Richard Avendon had photographed his family as well, so Allen already knew a lot of photographers. Raymond Foye had a very important role, how he rediscovered this resource. But he was kind-of out of the picture when I came around two years later.

Was a pricing model established for reproductions?
It was somewhat negotiable. He was being published in a lot of different venues, such as magazines and newspapers. I didn't have anything to do with the money, I was just doing the hands-on work, working with Sid and Brian, and then also working with Allen to find the photographs. Sometimes we'd have a stack of photographs that had to be signed. I often would take them to his house to do them there. Allen had strange office hours. He kind-of came alive around 4:00, just as we were getting ready to leave. Sometimes I would leave them overnight on his desk.

Did Allen pay close attention to the contact sheets and make decisions on what to print?
Oh yeah, he would circle what he thought were great photos. He wasn't just blindly selecting photos. And once in a while, other people would point out, "Here's a good photo." In the early period, Robert Frank would look at them all, and Frank was really the one that influenced him. Some of Allen's photos, the greatness of them, I think they are as close to Robert Frank as they can be. There's the one of Neal Cassady outside the billboard marquee in San Francisco, as well as some of those intimate portraits.

Do you have any favourites from the collection?
I loved the portraits from the 1980s. The one of Juanita Lieberman, from the Twelve Trees book, one of the few females he photographed, I think that's a magnificent one, the stress that's going on between Peter [Orlovsky] and Juanita. And then there's Anne Waldman, and she's a great diva. The famous Joanne Kyger one in front of the Buddha. But I love some of those early iconic ones like Cassady with the auto salesman and the stories that go with that. Toward the end though, I got pretty sick of the Beats!

What I loved were some of his portraits. I think his photograph of Peter Orlovsky's family is one of his masterpieces. And Burroughs. He and Burroughs would get together every year. My favourite one of Burroughs is when he's looking up at the trees and Allen photographs him; that was a lovely moment. Burroughs was a very sensitive guy, and people didn't really see him that way, but he was a sweet man.

I think maybe that's something Allen could draw out of him.
Allen had some kind of charisma of being loveable. He would enter people's worlds. Others might say other things, but all the years that I was with him and that I worked with him, he never once lost his temper with me. He was a real gentleman, and he was not a misogynist as other people have suggested. I feel like he was really respectful of people. What he really had a difficult time with was when people were being inauthentic. So he had a real allegiance to capture people at their most authentic. He had a cousin who was dying of cancer, and he photographed her at the kitchen table, and you can see that she's not a well person. But he would ask her, "What does it feel like to have cancer?" That's the poignancy. There's this allegiance of looking into the soul of another person.

Overall, what was the experience like working with Allen and the photographs?
It was a great experience. I think it did coincide with his poetics. I attended every class he taught over the years. There were about twelve years between Naropa and when I began to work at the office when I was in constant contact with Allen. He was a major teacher for me; and I think his poetics, the aesthetic of his poetics, which is more objectivist, the sacred notion of luminous details as being eternal, are transferred quite magnificently in his photographs. I think that was the appeal to me.

Sid Kaplan

Although largely unknown outside the world of photography, the name Sid Kaplan is legendary, particularly within the New York City photography scene. While a highly respected photographer in his own right, Kaplan is revered for his photo printing expertise, a reputation he gained largely through his decades-long work with the legendary photographer Robert Frank. Through Frank, he met Allen Ginsberg, and began working on printing and processing the Ginsberg photographs up until the poet's death.

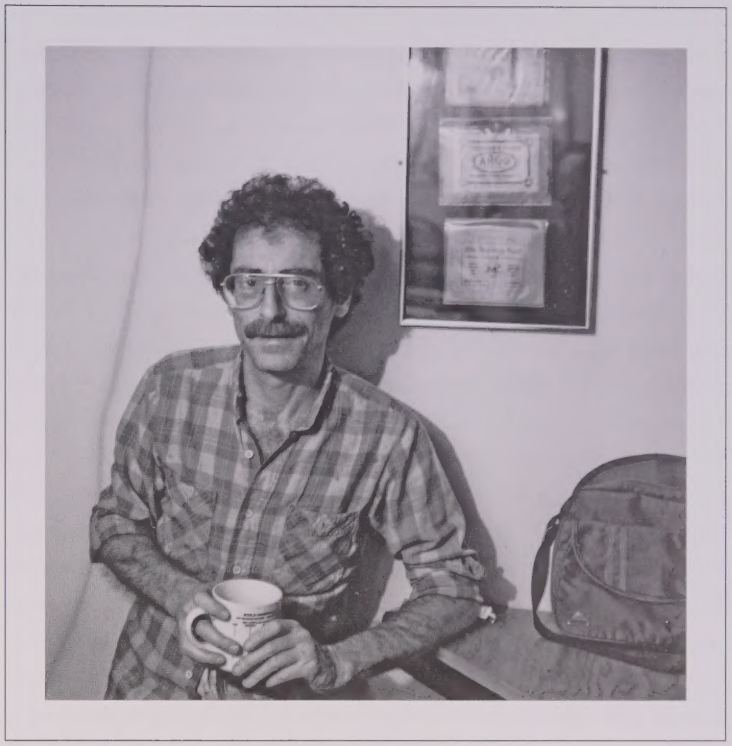
Although approaching his eightieth year, Kaplan is still active as a photographer, printer, and educator. This interview took place in the

fall of 2017 at Kaplan's Lower East Side apartment on Avenue A in New York City, where he's lived for almost forty years and which contains a dark room at the back.

How did you meet Allen – was it through Robert Frank?
I started working with Robert back in 1968, but I didn't meet Allen until the 1980s. In one of Robert's books, Allen wrote a really nice thing about the time we met each other for the first time. I went to Robert's place on Bleeker Street, and Allen was there, and that's how I originally met him. About five years ago, I was talking to Robert, and we were talking about someone we both knew that died, and Robert very casually said, "You know, I've seen a lot of close friends die, but of everybody, I miss Allen the most." And to a degree, I feel the same way. Once I got to know Allen, he was kind-of like an older brother to me.

How did you get involved with his photography?
Being I lived so close to Allen – his was right on the corner of 12th St. and 1st Ave. – and Allen knew Robert, that's when I started doing work for him. It was very good for me because I was making a lot of money off of it at the time.

How did you charge?
I charged by print. I can't remember how much – I don't even know



if I have the paperwork anymore. The first print was one price, and then after it got it set up in the machine, there's a price break. To make one print, to get it right, the tonality, the contrast, it may take an hour to do one of them. And afterward, once you get one, for the next hour you can do twenty of them.

I've heard the negatives were mostly in good shape.
They were pretty much in good shape. When he went to Columbia, he got a regular Kodak folding camera. It's an amateur camera, and probably the reason – and I don't know, but this is just a presumption – it was a folding camera was because it was easier to put in his pocket rather than a big box camera. He knew nothing about photography, so he would send the prints to get processed in whoever was around in the neighbourhood, like the local drugstore maybe. So they would send you back the prints in one package, and off to the side was an envelope with the negatives in them. He just left the negatives there. The condition of them was very good. But when you send it out to the drugstore, they have no idea, and probably Allen didn't

know at the time that you had to develop film longer. Technically, in printing some of these photographs, there were a lot of things in the darkroom that you had to do, like pulling rabbits out of a hat. But as far as negatives not being clean, they were in pretty good shape.

Except, but this is a good example, one time they were redoing Allen's book of the *Indian Journals*. They had to reprint a lot of the negatives, so I started to print them. There was one of them that was really bad. So bad that if you put your fingers over it, it felt a little bit like sandpaper. You see something like that, the standard procedure is you have to clean the negative from zero, which means you take the negative and soak it in water for a while. I soak it in water, and the whole emulsion slides off. I think, "Ok, now I'm in trouble." I call up Allen and I tell him. And then he tells me the story; that he got it developed in India. There's some guy in the darkroom, the chemistry he was using was in a rusty can. Apparently, it was so rusty, whatever the rust flakes were, they attached themselves to the film. But that was the only thing that was in bad shape.

I heard a story about you having to use some kind of toxic chemical to make a good print from a particular negative.
It's a special chemical to juice it up. It was one of those prints from a negative that was very thin. They had something which they took off the market, maybe thirty-five or forty years ago because it wasn't supposed to be safe. It's an intensifier, that's the technical term, called mercuric chloride. They took it off the market, but I made sure I had enough to last. But there were only a couple of those that required it, and only the ones taken with the folding camera.

How good were those folding cameras?
They were good, they would shoot decent pictures. Kodak made a lot of them. They didn't have much aperture control, but they had a little. They were also called at the time vest-pocket cameras. And they had pretty good technology. They didn't have too many settings. The instructions were very simple: they said, basically, with one particular film, shoot it in daylight from two hours before and two hours after sunrise, with the sun over your left shoulder. If you look at a lot of family photos from that period, the sun is always over the left shoulder. So basically in the beginning, that was Allen's thing.

What did you think of those early photographs?
They're great. It was just a bunch of guys taking pictures of each other, and that's it.

Were those the photos that you were mostly printing at the beginning?
I started with the early iconic ones, but after a while, I can't remember when he started to bring me film to develop – it was when Jacquline [Gens] was still working there because there was a couple of times he gave me some film personally and he'd say "I don't want the women to see these."

What do you remember about Allen then in terms of taking pictures?
Allen was always carrying a camera around with him. I have a lot of pictures of him taking pictures. There's even a few where we'd meet on the street and we'd both point a camera at each other and take a picture. But he always had a camera with him. They were mostly 35 mm cameras. He did have a Rollieflex, but he also had a 4x6 Fuji camera that was really nice. So Allen, he had some good, serious cameras.

Was he learning about the mechanics of the cameras?
He was interested to a degree. But he was always having trouble in dark places. I gave him a film once, it was 1000 ASA, and I said to him, "When you go in a dark place, just shoot it like your regular film," which was Tri-X 400 [a Kodak film]. And he'd ask me what the real ASA was, and I said 1000, but shoot it like the Tri-X. Because his indoor photos were always underexposed, so if you had a 1000 ASA and you were shooting it ASA 400, you'll have the detail you need. So what did he do? Well, he gives me the roll of film, and now it's the same way. And he says, "You told me the real ASA was 1000." He forgot that I told him to shoot it like the Tri-X 400.

So you were giving him advice along with Robert Frank.
He did have a collection of people that were important at the time. I think those couple of things Robert said to him, about being sure you don't cut the hands or the fingers off and be sure the background is cluttered, probably helped a hell of a lot.
What other pieces of advice did you give him on photography?

Basically how different cameras work, or he'd ask questions like "What does this button do?" Or, "What's this knob for?" He was curious. If only he'd taken my advice and used that film as Tri-X. But Allen was serious, he was serious about his photography.

When making the prints, would Allen have any input into the print?
Sure, and there are some prints of myself and Allen in the dark room together. When I'd say, "Hey Allen, I've got a print that maybe you should look at that I'm not too sure about," and he'd come over. A good example, again going way back to the New York City photos where him and Burroughs and Kerouac all were. He looked at a print, and one of them was a very light print, or one was substantially lighter than the other. And the one that was the lighter one, in the shadow area in the back, there were pictures hanging up. And Allen looks at it and says, "Hey, that's important. I've never seen it in that light before; we got to have that picture." There were some pictures on the wall in the background. And if Allen didn't come in and didn't see the brighter print, I probably would have printed it darker.

There's a thought that you can be taken seriously as a photographer if you don't do your own printing. What do you think?
Oh, I don't know, I've heard that thing forever. I don't think it's something he was ever really interested in. The thing with Robert [Frank], when we were working together, he had to be here because he knew exactly what he wanted. And more than that, he knew exactly how to get it. But Allen didn't have a clue. Allen might say, "Make it a little bit lighter," and then he'd see it and he might say, "Well maybe a little bit lighter than that."

I'm sure that famous Kerouac photo on the fire escape was one you probably could have done in your sleep, seeing as you probably printed it dozens of times.
That was a very tricky print to do. It was very underdeveloped, and at the time, I didn't have that magic fluid handy. What happened with the Kerouac thing, we had it printed on a very hard grade of paper. The difference between the face and his hair – if you made the face good, the hair would look grey. If you made the hair good, the face would look grey. So what I had to do on that one is to hold back the face. Normally, on an exposure in the dark room, on a thin negative, you could probably do maybe ten seconds at the most. The difference between the face and the hair was such that I had to keep printing, to make the light source darker and darker. So I get maybe thirty- to forty-second exposure. With that, I could just get in there with the dodging stick for maybe three seconds to light separate the face from the hair. It was a little bit trial and error.

Another interesting thing on the Kerouac one. When I started it, it was one size. And then, every time he had another print done, he kept adding things on to it. So then what I think what I had to do was change the size: make it smaller so that there would be more white space horizontal.

Do you remember any other challenging negatives?
Sure, there was another one, maybe on the same role of film, where Kerouac and Burroughs were playing with each other, pointing knives at each other. That one, the same thing. Another one, with Burroughs alone, a horizontal one, with a lot of books, a bookcase in front of him. The bookcases were hitting the sun, and Burroughs face wasn't in the sun. So again, it was more of a dark to light ratio than the film would be capable of doing.

What about the other really famous one, of Neal Cassady and Natalie Jackson under the marquee?
Yes, that's a great photo. And that was an easy photo to print as the exposure was good.

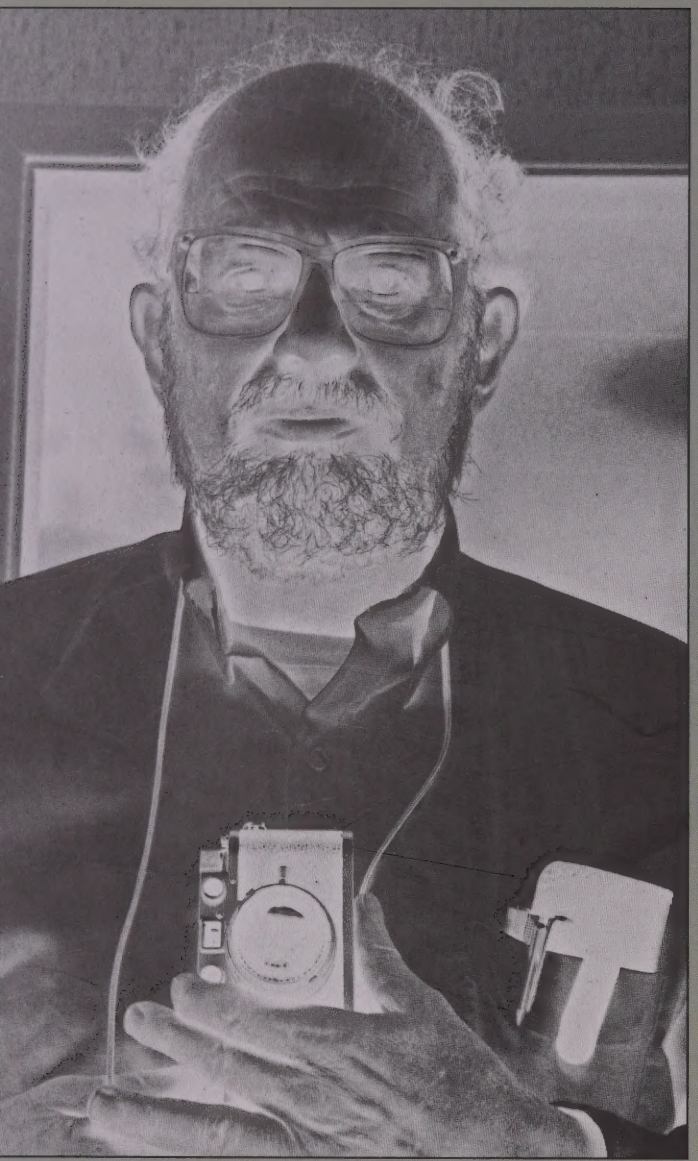
Any others that stand out for you?
I have one he did of me, so I made an 8x10 and he signed the copy for me. Another one of Robert that he did in front of his building at 12th St., that is also pretty good. There's also the last photos. A couple of days before Allen died, Robert was here. Robert comes over, or I was over at Robert's house, I forgot. And Robert says, "I was just over at Allen's place to see him, and he looked in really bad shape. He tried taking a picture of us, and he couldn't hold the camera steady." Well we knew already that it was just a matter of time before Allen dies. After he dies, one of the things I did was develop all of the film that Allen had left in the cameras. There was I think three cameras and they all had film. The last frame is the one that Allen shot of

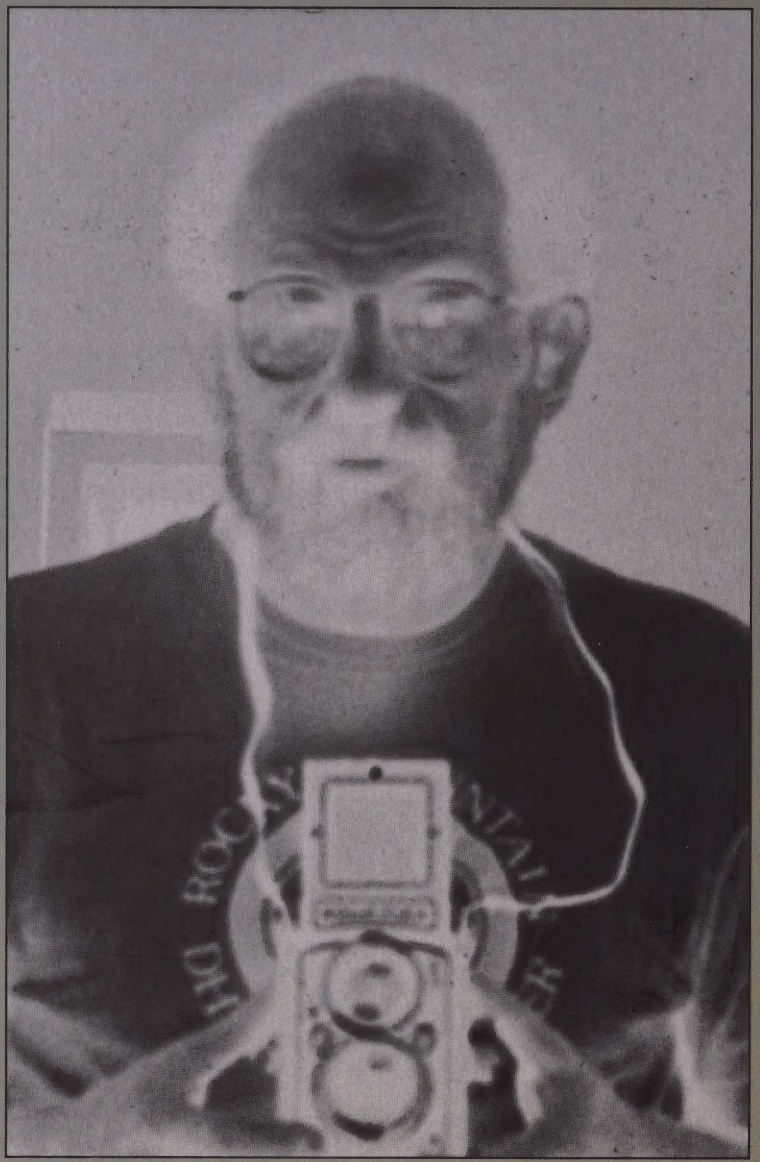
Robert and Peter. The next frame after, Allen was in a coma. Somebody picked up the camera and took pictures of him in the coma. I have a print of the two of them, a diptych, the first before and then the frame after that when he was in the coma.

That last roll of film – that must have been emotional for you.
It wasn't the first time I've had to do that type of thing. But seeing the first frames, I don't know what I was thinking, but obviously it wasn't anything good.

The relationship you had with Allen was obviously more than one between photographer and printer.
It was. I have another story about Allen. I was going through a bad time. It was a couple of days after my stepdad dies, and of course I was the guy in charge of the funeral arrangements and all of that kind of stuff. There was unbelievable rain, there's no food in here, and I have to go out and get something to eat. I'm walking up 12th St., and as I'm walking past, Allen is coming out the door. Allen was going out to eat too, so I started telling him about how bad I was feeling. So we sit down to eat together, and I don't know how he got into it, but the next thing I got was a personal reading of "Kaddish" [Ginsberg's celebrated poem about his mother] as we were having dinner. It was really unbelievable.

Do you ever think of your own role you've played in popularizing and legitimizing Allen Ginsberg as a photographer?
No, not really. Thank you for saying that. When I was doing it, I wasn't thinking that way at all, and I'm not sure Allen was thinking of it that way either. I just knew at the time at how blessed and lucky I was. One time, I was doing an exhibition together with Robert, and Robert was spending a lot of time here, and Allen knew it. Every morning, Allen would show up, sometimes with a pineapple, sometimes a cantaloupe, and I'd be in the darkroom working, and Robert and Allen were here together and just gabbing. I just knew, I was blessed, I was lucky. He definitely for me was an older brother. Allen was unbelievably nice to me. I could go on telling stories one after another about that. From my house, from here, to where Allen lived on 12th St., including the steps I had to walk up, it was eighty-three steps. So over the years, we got to know each other pretty good. I always had a spare key in his apartment – your closest neighbor should always have a key.





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